

VIVIAN FIANO

THE RELENTLESS TRILOGY

SEDUCTIVE
Prey



SEDUCTIVE PREY

RELENTLESS TRILOGY BOOK ONE

VIVIAN FIANO

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Editing by Amy Briggs of [Briggs Consulting LLC](#)

Cover Design by Elle Christensen of [Clover Book Designs and Premades](#)

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DEDICATION

THIS ENTIRE TRILOGY is dedicated to my girl Jodi Drake. Girl you have been one of my biggest supporters and I can't thank you enough. Thank you for always having my back, for being an ear when I needed you and for introducing me to my dark side. I love you girl!

PROLOGUE

JORDAN

WHEN I PULL into the gated parking lot, there are a ton of cars and minimal parking. I can't believe I'm doing this. My nerves are at an all-time high as I finally find a parking spot. I expel a deep breath and shake the jitters from my hands. My nerves have my stomach in knots as I approach the large brick building for the first time, but I have no choice. This is what I signed up for.

There's a small entrance on the side of the building, cluttered with soldiers smoking and joking. It surprises me, considering how physically fit we need to be. I'm reporting for my first weekend of the Recruitment Sustainment Program. Depending on your basic training ship date, you could attend up to three sessions of training. I'll be attending two. Since I don't have my uniform yet, they told me to report in civilian clothes. With the way these guys are looking at me, it seems that was a bad idea, but what other choice did I have?

"Well, well, look what we have here... fresh meat." A heavyset guy in uniform exhales a huge puff of smoke in my direction. I wave the smoke away from my face and give him a look of disgust. Clearly, this guy doesn't care too much about staying in shape for his PT test.

I quirk my eyebrow at the guy. "I may be new, but I'm no one's *meat*." I exaggerate the word. It's inappropriate on so many levels for them to talk to me like that.

Shaking my head, I push my way through the crowd and ignore the ridiculous comments coming from behind me.

"I'd love to sink my teeth into her meat," one of the guys jokes.

I'm about to pull the door open when I hear a deep voice shout, "At Ease!" I instantly freeze, standing by the door. I have no idea what I'm supposed to do right now, but that commanding voice is preventing me from moving.

"What in God's creation are you thinking?" a loud, angry voice growls out. No doubt someone of high rank heard the comments these pigs were making. I get a glimpse of a tall, handsome man, standing there giving the group of men an evil look. I'm still frozen in my spot, waiting for him to tell us all to carry on, but he continues his rant. "If I ever hear you talking about one of the soldiers that way again, you'll all be wearing my boots across your ass, and I can promise you it will be reported to our commanding officer. Is that clear?" He gets right up in their faces. It makes me want to laugh because it's awesome that they got busted, but I contain myself.

"Yes, Staff Sergeant!" They all shout in unison.

"Make a hole," he barks out, and they all scramble to move out of his way. "Good morning, can I help you?"

"I'm Private Smith. Today is my first day of the sustainment program."

He nods. "I'm Staff Sergeant Summers. Welcome to the 211 th MP Company."

"Good morning, Staff Sergeant, and thank you," I respond, standing tall.

"At ease, soldier." He pulls the door open and ushers me inside. The entrance to the building is a long narrow hallway with multiple offices on either side. He begins pointing to rooms, telling me who they belong to. He turns to me. "I know this is your first day here, and this is a lot to take in, but you'll get there. There's another soldier who is also a part of the sustainment program coming in as well. He's in my section. You will be with Staff Sergeant Cummings, and I'll direct you to her office."

"Thank you." This guy is scary but seriously hot at the same time. I know it's frowned up for me to have thoughts

like this toward another soldier, but hot damn I can't help it. His uniform fits him like a glove and I'm willing to bet he is built like a brick house underneath it. His hazel eyes may have been full of anger, but they soften when he gazes down at me.

He has a perfect smile that lights up his face. "You're welcome." He starts down the hall again. "I promise you those knuckleheads will pay for their comments."

"I'm not too worried about it. I may be a female, but my father is a fire chief. He taught me not to take shit from anyone." I continue walking behind him, trying to keep up with his long demanding strides.

He chuckles. "That's good to hear." He turns back to me. "Where is he the fire chief? I'm a Boston cop in the civilian world."

"He's in Boston as well. Chief Smith, district five."

He nods. "I've heard of him, but not sure we've formally met."

We enter a large open room with shiny wooden floors and basketball hoops tucked up toward the ceiling. He catches me glancing around the room. "We call this the drill shed. This is where you'll fall in for formation."

I nod. "Supply is part of the first platoon, but Staff Sergeant Cummings will go over all of that with you."

We step into another large room in the far back corner of the drill shed. "Good morning, Staff Sergeant. Your new recruit is here."

"Awesome. Good morning, Private Smith." She holds her hand out and shakes with me.

"Thank you for helping me out, Staff Sergeant Summers." I smile up at the tall, handsome soldier.

"You're welcome. If you have any issues, please do not hesitate to come see me. I will not tolerate any MP treating you that way." I bite my lower lip watching as he leaves the room.

"What is he talking about, Smith?" Staff Sergeant Cummings pulls me from my thoughts.

I quickly filled her in as thoughts of this fine man run through my head. I have never had a man capture my attention the way he did, and I can't help but wonder if I'll get the opportunity to see him again before I come back from basic training.

CHAPTER

ONE

GRANT

“THIS IS THE POLICE, OPEN UP.” Lynch pounds on the door, but no one answers. I can hear muffled voices and shuffling around from inside the apartment. He kicks the door in, leaving it hanging half off the cheap hinges. The four of us rush into the apartment, shouting for everyone to get down on their knees. The female, a skinny woman with greasy hair and dingy clothes, drops to her knees and puts her hands behind her head. A scrawny, dirty male tries to run toward the window, but we’re too quick for him. Lynch grabs him and we pull him back in.

“Stupid bitch. I can’t believe you led the cops here.” He tries to kick her while we are putting him in cuffs. Dorsey, a female cop, picks her up and pulls her out of his reach.

Lynch, Burns, and Dorsey take the suspects down to the two waiting cars while I start the search and secure the scene. We will need to gather all of the evidence.

The place is a mess. There are drugs spread out all over a large table in the living room, and the couch is ripped and tattered. Bottles and empty food wrappers are scattered all over the place. I make my way to the kitchen. My feet are sticking to the dirty floor.

It takes me back to a time when I lived in similar conditions. Even the layout of the apartment is identical to the one I grew up in.

I search cabinet after cabinet and find there’s not one bit of food in any of the cupboards. The fridge is empty and there’s a pile of dirty dishes in the sink. It smells like a dump in here.

A noise draws my attention toward a back bedroom. I pull my weapon from its holster, slowly making my way down the hall toward what sounds like a TV. The door is slightly ajar. I gently push it open holding my gun up, ready to shoot if necessary.

My pulse is racing when I see a small boy with overgrown dark brown hair sitting on a dirty bed wearing clothes that are way too small for him. "Hey, buddy, what's your name?"

"Jonathan. What's yours?"

I smile, holster my gun and slowly walk over to him, being careful not to scare him. "My name is Officer Summers."

"Are you here to arrest my mom?" he questions looking to the floor.

I narrow my eyes. "Why would we arrest your mom?" I'm curious to see how much this kid knows.

He shrugs. "The last time the police were here, they told my mom if she got in trouble again, she would go to jail."

"How old are you?"

"Seven."

What the fuck!

"Grant! Get in here."

"Yeah, Mom?" I run into the other room as quickly as I can. Mom doesn't like it when I don't answer her immediately. She's sitting on the couch wearing a long T-shirt. Her medicine is spread out all over the coffee table. My mom takes a lot of medication. She needs it to get through the day.

"What are you doing in there?" she barks out at me.

"I'm playing with my truck, Mom."

She grabs me by the arm and drags me back to my room, attaching the cold metal bracelet she got from her

friend to my wrist. I'm not too fond of it, but it's how I know Mom is about to have friends over. When she has friends over, I'm not allowed to leave my room.

"Mom, can I have something to eat?"

"No! There's no food, so you'll have to suck it up." She heads toward the door. "And I don't want to hear a peep out of you."

A door slams, pulling me back to the present. "I'm sorry, kid. Come with me." I bring him out to the kitchen and sit him at the table with Officer Dorsey. This kid appears to be about ten pounds underweight. "When's the last time you ate?" He shrugs. "Stay with him. I'll be right back."

I hustle down three flights of disgusting, sticky stairs that reek of piss. Lynch is handing the drug dealer over to one of the other guys. Mason and his partner have the mother.

"I'll be right back," I shout to my partner as I run across the street to the small market. The place is pretty empty. There's a customer or two and an older gentleman behind the counter.

"Good afternoon, officer. How can I help you?"

"I'm grabbing some food for a little boy across the street."

I grab a sandwich, chips, cookies, and a huge container of chocolate milk and place them on the counter.

The man shakes his head. "It's the little ones that suffer." I nod and pay the gentleman before running back across the street.

Lynch heads back up with me. "You know we have to call social services, right?"

I nod slightly. "I know." I pause choosing my words carefully. These situations get me choked up. "It kills me. I see this kid, and I see myself. The same scared look in his

eyes." I shake my head. "I can't tell you the number of times the cops busted down our door looking for my mom or her pimp. Never mind the nights we stayed in abandoned buildings trying to avoid them." I look at him. "Shit's scary for a little boy."

"I'm sure it is." He slaps me on the back. "I can't say I know what it's like because I don't and I'm sorry you had to go through it, but it makes you a kick-ass cop, Grant." Lynch has been my partner and mentor since my first day on the force. We've gotten to know each other quite well. It's a must when you put your lives in each other's hands on a daily basis. He knows my history and I know his. I wouldn't say everything was handed to him, but he certainly had it much easier than I did growing up.

"I guess the saying is true...everything happens for a reason." This shit right here is why I became a cop. I wanted to help kids going through the same shit I went through.

I kneel down in front of the boy. "I want you to know you're going to be okay." I look him in the eye. He rewards me with a small smile and the slightest nod as if he's not sure he believes me. "Here." I clear him a spot at the dirty dingy kitchen table and unpack the food I bought him.

"Thank you," he says, his eyes wide with excitement.

"You're welcome, buddy." I ruffle his hair as he devours his meal. I want to tell him to slow down, but I can't when I know what he's going through. I know how it feels to be starved for food.

He looks up at me, his eyes moist with unshed tears. "What's going to happen to me, sir?" His voice trembles with fear.

"We're going to figure that out together after you're done eating."

"Okay." He drinks his milk.

When we get back to the precinct, we get to work on filling out the paperwork on our bust today. Lynch tried to

pull his escape act in the car on the way over here, but I told him he wasn't getting off that easy, so we're both sitting at a computer entering the information. "How come you didn't play pool this weekend?" he asks, knowing a bunch of us like to get together for a few rounds to let loose.

"I had guard duty this weekend." I instantly smile, remembering Private Smith. That girl is a pistol. She's all of five foot four, but totally fearless. I thought she was going to wreck them for busting her lady balls, but she maintained her composure and walked away. I'm not a fan of guys treating female soldiers the way they did, but when I saw her, I wanted to tear them apart. Those long, lean legs and that silky blond hair had me talking myself down. Never mind her stunning blue eyes.

"What has you all smiles?"

"I met a girl this weekend. She's a new recruit at my unit. She's beautiful. I can't even imagine a woman as attractive as her joining the military." I shake my head and continue my paperwork as I fill him in. "I got to have lunch with her. There were other new recruits there with us, but damn, I swear she was discreetly flirting with me."

"Isn't that against regulations?"

I nod. "Unfortunately, it is, seeing I'm a Staff Sergeant and she's only a private." I grin. They say rank has its privileges, but not in this case. If we were both a lower rank it wouldn't be so bad. I glance up over my monitor. "That means if she's single, I have to find a way around it."

CHAPTER TWO JORDAN

SOME PEOPLE MIGHT THINK a dancer couldn't achieve what I accomplished. After nine weeks of boot camp and another nine weeks at advanced individual training, I'm ready to go home. It's something I'm proud to have experienced, and now I'll have the money I need to go back to school. With a smile on my face, I stare out the window of the plane, thinking back on some of my amazing experiences.

"Chowdah, front and center!" My drill sergeant shouts the nickname he gave me when he heard my Boston accent.

"Yes, drill sergeant!" Peaches and I run over to the man that has spent the last three weeks in our face, shouting at us for anything and everything. He's a muscular guy but only about five nine. I swear they pick guys like that on purpose. This guy gets right in our face and it is so intimidating to have him stare you in the eye while screaming at you. No matter how much you try to prepare mentally, nothing prepares you for the brown rim of a drill sergeant's hat centimeters from your forehead as he screams in your face.

"Private, is it true that you took the lead in your bay and organized the women, creating shower and cleaning schedules?"

"Yes, drill sergeant," I scream, standing tall and at attention.

"Fan-fucking-tastic private." He looks over his shoulder. "Seymore!" Another soldier from our platoon comes running over along with his battle buddy. In the Army, you never approach a drill sergeant without your battle buddy. Peaches and I have been battle buddies since day one.

"Yes, drill sergeant." He stands at attention.

"You are no longer the platoon leader." He looks at me.

"Chowdah is now your platoon leader. She understands the concept of teamwork."

My eyes go wide, but I quickly recover. "Yes, drill sergeant." We both shout, and he dismisses us. Peaches and I squeal with excitement for my first military accomplishment, and we run off to tell some of our friends.



The plane touches down, and I'm minutes away from seeing my family. I want to run off the plane, but I'm in the back. It's going to take forever to get off. I'm not the only soldier on the flight. There's another girl seated near me. In our brief conversation, I learned she was coming back from boot camp as well.

When the plane stops, I don't bother moving because I know I have a few minutes. I settle back into my seat, but the captain surprises me by making an announcement over the intercom, "Attention, ladies, and gentlemen. It has come to my attention that we have two US Army soldiers on this flight returning home from boot camp. I ask that you all remain seated while they gather their belongings and depart the plane first."

My jaw drops as the plane erupts with clapping and cheering. The two of us look at each other and quickly get our stuff. Even though we don't know each other, we welcome one another home and hurry to meet our families.

As I step onto the escalator that will take me to the baggage claim and my family, I spot the signs that say "Congratulations" and "Welcome Home PFC Smith", and my heart is overcome with joy. My family and friends are jumping up and down, cheering for me. I can't help but

laugh as tears of joy stain my cheeks. The excitement makes the escalator ride to the lower level seem like an eternity.

When it finally gets to the bottom, I hurl myself into the arms of the most amazing and supportive woman I know. "I've missed you so much," she whispers, rubbing my back as she squeezes me tight.

"I've missed you too, Mom," I say, pushing past the lump in my throat. My dad and my sister, Piper, join in, wrapping us in one big family hug. It feels so good to be home.

"I know I gave you a lot of grief about doing this, but I'm so proud of you," my dad chokes out, kissing me on the head.

We continue to enjoy our moment together until the beeping of the baggage carousel finally catches our attention and breaks us up. Strangers have gathered around clapping and cheering. I'm overwhelmed with pride. My parents begin watching for my duffel bag while I say hi to my friends. "Girl, I can't believe you did it!" Kendra squeals, wrapping me in a hug.

"I knew you would rock it." Jodi grins. "Bring it in." She wraps me in a brief hug. "I'm glad to see you home."

"Thanks, girl." Jodi and I are a lot alike. We're both hard-working, we love to dance, and we can take a lot of shit.

I finally get to Sloan, the lone guy in our group of friends. He's observing from afar, sporting a small smile. While I'm happy to see him, things started to get weird between us shortly before I left. Shaking off that thought, I approach him with pride. "I did it," I say with a big cheesy smile.

He lets out an odd chuckle. "I hate that you left. I hate you went through that. But I'm proud of you, and I'm glad you made it home in one piece." He puts one arm around me and kisses me on the cheek. Sloan is the brother I never had, and I love him dearly for it.

"What is there to hate? It was the most amazing experience of my life. I learned so much, and I stretched

myself to do things I never thought I could do." He shrugs, making our moment a bit awkward. I'm not sure what more to say.

"Come on," Jodi calls out relieving me of this awkward silence between us. "Your parents have your stuff."

Everyone squeezes into my parents' minivan as my mom says, "Jordan, we have a bit of a surprise for you when we get back."

"Awesome! What's up?"

"You'll see." My mom winks and turns to the front as my dad exits the airport.

"Okay, so tell us all about it." Jodi rubs her hands together like an evil villain about to hatch a master plan.

"What's there to tell?" I shrug. "Basic was a lot of exercises, yelling, and learning."

"That's it?" Kendra's jaw literally drops. "Come on, we all know there's more to it than just working out and yelling. Did you shoot guns and stuff?"

I laugh. "It was amazing." My lips curl up in a smile as I think about all I accomplished. I've always considered myself to be strong. My father had us in martial arts and self-defense classes most of our lives, but some of my training was legit nerve-wracking. "When we first got there, things were chaotic. Drill sergeants were yelling at us, no one knowing what to do, but it got better as time went on. We did this cool repel tower. Girl, I was so scared at first. When I got to the top and looked over the edge, I shook my head and told my Drill Sergeant there was no way I was doing it." I chuckle. "He actually laughed at me—right before he screamed for me to get off his F'ing tower."

"So, did you do it?" Kendra asks on the edge of her seat.

I nod. "My body was shaking, but I remembered my training. With my heels flat against the wall, I sat back into position. At first, I lightly kicked off the wall and barely moved, but as I got the hang of it, I was able to kick off

harder and harder. By the time I got to the bottom, I was ready to go again."

"That is so badass." Jodi fist bumps me.

"I made some good friends too. My girl, Peaches, and I got separated after boot camp, but we managed to keep in touch, writing to each other all through Advanced Individual Training, or AIT as we call it." I smile, thinking about the day we met. "We literally crashed into each other on the bus leaving the reception center. We were on our way to meet our drill sergeants and see where we would spend the next nine weeks. We ended up in the same platoon and bunked together."

"Was it as loud as they say it is?" Kendra asks.

"In the beginning, it is. They want to break you, so they get up in your face and yell a lot, but eventually, we figured out how to work as a team, and it got better." I shrug. "We learned military rules and regulations. We ran and worked out every day." My mind races through the memories of everything we had to do to graduate. "There were a lot of team-building courses. One of my favorite parts was throwing a live hand grenade."

"You what?" my mother chimes in.

"I did. It was so cool, Mom. We practiced with a fake one for a while first and then they took us to this area where there are small sections of thick cement walls. Each drill sergeant takes one soldier and one grenade behind the wall. You pull the pin, toss it over the wall, and hit the floor. Man does the earth shake when it explodes. It's an adrenaline rush. Some of us were actually trembling when we did it. It was pretty amazing."

"Holy shit, girl, that's crazy!" Jodi practically shouts.

"Is it true you spent two weeks in a tent?" Kendra asks with a huge grin.

I laugh. "No, not true at all." I shake my head. "We had a hideous twelve-mile hike. Our entire company was spread out in two lines on either side of the road. We hiked over

everything from dirt roads, to the pavement, to red clay. Our feet were killing us by the time we finally arrived at this big open field where we set up tents and learned how to dig foxholes. We stayed there for two days and then hiked back."

"What was the scariest thing you did?" Piper asks.

"Throwing the live grenade. The drill sergeants told us there's always one dumb ass whose grenade doesn't make it over the wall, and I didn't want to be that person. It's easy to throw a fake grenade. If it doesn't go far, you live. If you don't throw the live one correctly, you better pray your drill sergeant gets that shit over the wall before it explodes."

I'm so animated about filling my friends in that I don't notice we're at my parents' house already. My dad grabs my bag and puts it in the trunk of Kendra's car since she's been looking after my apartment and will be taking me home from here.

"Come on. I made everyone some dinner," my mom says. My mom is a great cook and loves to entertain so I'm not surprised she's cooked.

"Great, I'm starving and could use a good home-cooked meal." I pat my stomach.

My father opens the door, and a thunderous scream erupts the second I step inside. All of my friends have gathered to welcome me home. I had no idea my parents had planned a welcome home party, but I love it. Marianne, the owner of the dance studio I work at, as well as Steph and Meg, are here. They teach with me. I notice even some of my students' parents have come out to see me. I'm overwhelmed by the support.

"Thanks, Mom." I hug her one more time before she heads to the kitchen. I know my mom, she cooked for all of these people.

Marianne, Meg, and Steph all come over to hug me, along with some of the moms. "Are the girls here?" I ask,

hoping to see some of my students.

"No, we wanted to surprise them," Marianne informs me. "We're hoping you'll come back to class on Monday."

"Absolutely. I miss them so much."

"They miss you," Shayna, one of the moms, informs me.

As I finish greeting my guests, my mom hands me a plate and tells me to grab some food. She has a huge buffet set up. She's amazing.

"Thank you so much, Mom!"

I grab all of my favorites and take a seat on the couch next to Sloan. "So, what's been going on since I've left. You didn't write much."

He chuckles. "Yeah. Sorry, life has been crazy. I got promoted to manager at the store, so I've been training and working crazy hours."

"That's cool. Congratulations."

"Thanks."

Some friends join us in the living room. "Tell us all about it, Jordan."

"What do you want to know?" People are pulling chairs over; some have sprawled out on the floor to hear my stories.

"What did you love the most?" Marianne asks.

"My favorite was the range. It was cool, learning how to fire my M4. At first, it's scary. You step out onto this large open field with targets set up at various distances. The drill sergeants walk you through the different positions, and you have to learn them all even though some are uncomfortable at first." I smile, thinking back.

*"Holy shit, chowdah, you can handle a fucking weapon!"
my drill sergeant shouts in amazement.*

"Thanks, drill sergeant."

"I was extremely nervous because I learned I'm left eye dominant, which means I had to fire left-handed even though I typically use my right hand for everything." I pause, remembering the time a shell ejected from the side of my rifle and got caught in the neck of my top. Holy hell was it hot. I instantly dropped my rifle to dig it out. Lucky for me, my drill sergeant happened to be right there coaching me, and he helped me get it out. I know I'll have a scar from that little sucker. That is the one downside to being a leftie shooter.

The rest of the night is spent sitting around the living room, catching up with what's been happening with my friends and family while I was away. It was the perfect way to spend my first night home.

CHAPTER

THREE

GRANT

LYNCH and I are back at it, keeping the streets of Boston safe. Day in and day out, we patrol an area of the city that's heavy with drugs, and it seems to be getting worse as time goes on. The real problem is that even though we're taking guys down, it's always the little guys. Those who are too afraid to talk, so we can't get to the big fish. That's why my goal is to make it onto the Boston SWAT team. I want to kick in doors and take down the big bosses. Be one of the guys that will make a difference in improving our city and I'm so close to achieving that goal. I've been a Police Officer for almost five years now and during that time I've busted my ass to accomplish all the training required for SWAT. Now I have to bide my time and wait for an opening.

Today we're in a parking lot full of debris. Most of the brick walls of the abandoned buildings are tagged with graffiti. It's sad to think people care so little about their community that this is what it becomes. This is where a lot of the drug deals go down and where people hide and get high.

Given my background, I've made it my life's mission to rid this city of the drug epidemic. I know I can't do it alone. I'm only one person, but it doesn't mean I can't try.

"Dude, you gonna sit there fidgeting with that phone our entire shift?"

I chuckle. "You know how tight I am with my grandmother?"

He shrugs. "Yeah."

"Dude, she hasn't been herself lately. One of her friends is taking her to the doctor. I'm supposed to hear from her

as soon as they're finished." My grandmother is the only family I have left. She means the world to me, and I know she can't live forever, but it doesn't make it easier knowing she's getting up there in age.

"Why don't you text her and ask for an update?" Lynch asks, the concern written on his face. Lynch has a wife and kids, so he knows the importance of family and understands my worries.

I shrug. "Because I know my grandmother, and she'll either ignore me or feed me some bullshit. She tells me all the time how I worry about her too much and I need to live my life."

A voice rings out over the radio, stopping our conversation. Lynch clicks the button to let them know we're on our way. Someone needs assistance with a traffic stop. I guess my update will have to wait either way.

I click on the lights and siren as he pulls out of our spot and takes off toward the scene. When we pull up, there's another patrol car already there, and a car pulled over to the side of the road with its hazards flashing. Lynch and I step out and approach the other officers.

"What's up?" Lynch asks.

"This kid has a warrant for his arrest, but he thinks I'm just writing him a ticket. I have a feeling this isn't going to go well," Officer Jones informs us.

I notice the kid fumbling around in the car. "Keep your hands on the wheel!" I shout to the driver. I have to squint, but I can see that he's watching us in the rear-view mirror as he slowly places his hands back on the wheel. "This guy is getting antsy. Let's do this," I suggest.

Lynch approaches from the passenger's side, and the other two officers and I go to the driver's side. "Keep your hands on the wheel," I warn with one hand on my taser, while the other one reaches in the window to open the car door.

"Step out slowly," the officer in charge instructs him. He swings his legs out of the car and stands awkwardly. He starts to pull at his pants, but I don't trust him, so I grab him before he can try anything and slam his body against the car. "Don't reach for anything. Hands on the roof," I growl.

"I wasn't. My pants are falling down." He sucks at his teeth.

"I said, place your hands on the roof, now!" He does as I order. "Spread 'em." I kick his legs apart and begin frisking him. "Is there anything in your pockets that will hurt me?"

"Nah, man. I'm clean."

"You call carrying a gun, clean?" I pull the weapon from his waistband, stick it on the roof of the car, and cuff him. "Do you have a license to carry that?" I ask, but he doesn't respond. "I'll take your silence as a no." I pull him off the vehicle and toward my car.

"It doesn't matter, either way, we have a warrant for your arrest, so you're going to jail, my friend," Officer James says, shaking his head as we walk by.

While the other two officers are going through the perp's car, I discover his gun is fully loaded. Removing the magazine, I secure it and place it into an evidence box.

"Pop the trunk," Lynch calls out. As soon as it opens, the smell of marijuana punches us in the face. There's a black bag in the trunk. Lynch unzips it and begins counting the bundles.

"Holy shit." Lynch shakes his head. "Well, I guess we know why he was carrying. There's a lot of money in here."

I look down to see piles of cash sitting in the bottom of the bag.

"Nice bust," I tell James. "There's enough here to put this guy away for a while. Maybe even get him to talk a little."

He shakes his head. "I doubt it. This kid is so low on the totem pole. He'd rather go to jail than be killed."

I'm one of the lucky ones, and I know it. With my history, I could've ended up like this kid, running drugs for my mom's dealer, making some serious cash. Some don't have the privilege of cops helping them pull themselves away from this life the way I did. Now he'll go spend a couple of years in jail and it'll either clean him up or make him worse. God only knows which way he'll go when the time comes.



JORDAN

I'm so excited to see the girls at the dance studio this morning, so I came in early. The second I open the door, the familiar smell of Lysol and Febreze apple spice plugins brings back fond memories from the last time I was here. It's amazing how simple smells you once forgot existed, can bring you back in time and make you so happy.

Nothing has changed. I run my fingers over the tiny fingerprints left behind on the mirror from the littles, as we call them. No matter how much we clean these mirrors, the fingerprints always exist. It's as if they're permanently embedded in the glass. Like the mark these girls have left on my heart.

Before I left for basic, the girls were all here for the going away party that Marianne, Meg, and Steph threw for me. I smile, thinking back to all the girls skipping around the studio. Some of them thought it was fun because it was a party, but others were sad. I missed a very important day of the year for these girls, the annual recital. It broke my heart.

"Miss Jordan, do you have to go?" Little Avery stands before me, pouting with tears welling in her beautiful blue eyes.

I take a seat on the floor in front of her, tucking her long blonde hair behind her ear. "I do sweet girl, but I will be back before you know it."

A tear slips down her cheek. "I'm going to miss you."

"I will miss you too." I sit up on my knees. "I need you to do me a big favor." I lift her chin, forcing her to look at me. "I need you to work really hard for Miss Megan, Miss Marianne, and Miss Stephanie." She nods, "And when you get on that stage, you dance your heart out. Okay?"

She rewards me with a faint smile. "I'm going to make you proud, Miss Jordan."

"I know you will, sweet girl." I wrap her in a huge hug and hold her for a moment before saying goodbye.

The girls will be here soon, so I need to get ready. With a huge smile, I jog to our dressing room, change into my dance clothes, and tuck my stuff up into my cubby. My fingers dance over the faded name tag below the spot that's held my stuff for the last twenty years. I started dancing when I was five. At the age of fifteen, I became a student teacher, and as soon as I graduated, Marianne hired me full time. As the studio grew, she hired Meg, and then Steph, who works part-time helping out here and there.

This place makes me so happy. It's where I can release my stress and emotions through movement. It's where the feeling of acceptance and love shows through the girls' excitement to see me teaching their class.

I don't know if I can ever give this up. However, I did some serious soul searching while I was away. I've decided

to enroll in college online. I'm going to take some business courses, so if I ever do decide to open a studio of my own, I'll have the skills I need, and if not, I'll have the knowledge needed to get a different job. Now I need to get my school benefits squared away with my National Guard Unit. My understanding is I have to complete a couple of drill weekends before I enroll, but I'm hoping to get the process started.

"Hey, Jordan." Marianne comes in, pulling me from my thoughts. "The girls will be here in about fifteen minutes. Why don't you hide in the storage closet?" She opens the door to the large storage area we have.

"Good idea." I step inside and sit to stretch. We use this space to store props, extra costumes, and other stage material we may want to reuse.

I can hear Marianne telling Meg that I'm hiding out in the closet. A few minutes later, I hear some of the students arriving.

I can hear the giggles coming from the other side of the door. The sound makes my heart melt. It's at this moment that I realize how much these girls mean to me and how much I've missed them. As usual, they're playing around and being silly. Meg tells them to hurry up and get ready to begin because she has a surprise for them today.

The girls are whispering, asking each other if they know what the surprise is. It makes me want to pop out of the closet now, but I stick with the plan, even though I can't wait to see their faces when I walk out.

Things start to quiet down when Marianne speaks, "First, welcome to summer camp. Some of you have already attended a week of camp here, and for some of you, this is new, but either way, I know you are going to have a great time."

Our camp runs on an every other week schedule. One week we have camp, and the next, we work on stuff for the upcoming season. "We have some great things planned for

you." Marianne continues on, "Yes, we will dance and learn routines, but we're also going to make crafts and go on a few field trips. Does that sound like fun?" Marianne continues on. The girls begin to shout and cheer excitedly. "Okay, now Miss Meg mentioned we have a surprise for you today. Are you ready to see what it is?"

"Yes!"

I quietly tiptoe out onto the dance floor. Tricia spots my reflection in the mirror, and her eyes go wide. She jumps up and screams, "Miss Jordan!" The girls' eyes light up with excitement as they run at me, wrapping me in a hug. The moment overwhelms me, the dam breaks, and tears stream down my cheeks.

"I've missed you girls so much." They're all fighting to get their tiny arms around me. This is one of the many reasons I never want to stop teaching. I love these girls so much. They make my heart happy.

"Are you home for good?" Tricia asks.

I nod my head and secretly pray I never have to deploy. That's something these girls are too young to understand, and I won't dare try to explain it.

"I know you girls have questions, so why don't we take some time to sit and catch up with Miss Jordan?" Marianne suggests.

The girls are between the ages of six and ten. I'm hoping their questions aren't too crazy because I don't want to scare them. I take a seat with my back to the mirror, and the girls all spread out in front of me, most of them are so close they're practically on my lap, and it makes me laugh. I know they're going to cling to me all week long, and I'm perfectly fine with it. Some of these girls cried when they realized I was going to miss their recital because of being away. I would have loved to be here, but I had no choice. The way my schedule fell, I ended up home two weeks too late. Marianne wanted to try and change it, but it would have messed up the end of season schedule and camp

starting. As sad as I was, I feel I made the right decision when I told her to leave it be.

"Who has a question?" I ask, and their hands fly up in the air. "Tricia." This little girl holds a very special place in my heart. We performed together one season, and it was such a sweet opportunity. The routine was quite emotional, and she worked hard.

"Was it scary?"

I take a minute to think about it. "I don't know that I would say it was scary. We got yelled at a lot at first, and I think it was more annoying than scary. I think they try to scare you, but it wasn't bad." Their hands shoot up again. "Sammy."

"What was your favorite part?"

I chuckle. "You know, I liked most of my training, but my favorite part was the zip line. I had to climb this huge tower. To get to the top, I had to do things like walk across some slippery logs and climb a rope ladder. When I finally made it, they hooked me up to harnesses, and then I stepped off the tower, holding onto the straps as we slid down a rope. There was a bar at the end that made me swing up into the air. And there was this cool canvas that said, 'Victory is yours.' It made me feel proud of what I had accomplished."

They all listen excitedly as I continue to answer their questions until Marianne tells them it's time for us to start dance class. They begin to whine, wanting to talk more until I remind them that I'm back and that they have plenty of time to ask questions.

"Everyone get on your ballet shoes please." Meg calls out.

When they return, I lead them through stretches as Meg turns some music on, and they instantly change their attitude. "Show me what you got." The girls go through their routines. I can't help but smile as I watch them do what they love.

The day has flown by. My heart melts as the last student is picked up for the day. I've had so much fun with them, and it feels so good to be back, doing what I love.

"Okay, so we need to lock in the crafts and things we want to do and on which days," Marianne says when she pulls us together for a quick meeting. Once we go through the week's schedule, we finally call it a day. It's getting late, and we're starving. We all head to the back to grab our stuff.

As I walk to my car, I scroll through the notifications on my phone. I have a few unread texts. I'm assuming they're from my mom since I'm supposed to head over for dinner, but I am wrong. It's Sloan.

When I stop to cross the street, the hairs on the back of my neck stand up, and a chill runs down my spine. I look back over my shoulder, but I don't see anything. When I turn to look the other way, I spot a young man leaning against the building. I narrow my eyes, trying to get a better look. He appears to be looking directly at me. The young man laughs and starts up the street.

My phone rings, causing me to jump. I exhale and answer with a huge smile when I see it's Sloan.

"Hey," his voice rings out.

"How are you?" I ask, jogging across the street to my car. I quickly jump in and start it up, waiting for my phone to connect.

"Good. I'm leaving work and thought I would give you a shout." I can hear how happy he is.

"Cool, me too. How was your day?" I ask, genuinely interested in how his new position is going. He has worked hard to earn a managerial position at a gaming store, and now that he has it, he's busting ass.

"It was good, but I'm not calling to chat about work. I wanted to apologize. I know I've been hard on you about the military thing. I just want you to know it's because I care." Sloan was not happy when I announced that I was

joining the Army National Guard. He argued that, as a dancer, I didn't have what it took to make it through boot camp, but it only made me want to work harder to prove him wrong.

"I know you do, and I appreciate it, but if you truly care, then you need to support my decisions." Before I left, he tried everything he could to get me to stay, but when I have my mind set on something, it takes a lot to change it. I was frustrated, he would try to scare me instead of trying to support me.

He chuckles, "I'm working on it, Chowdah."

I burst into laughter. "I should have never told you guys about that. Now, I'm never going to live it down."

"Let me make it up to you. How about some dinner? It's my treat."

"Sorry, I can't. I made plans with my parents tonight. They were so sweet to share me with everyone the other night, so now I need to spend some time with them."

"That's cool. A rain check then?"

"For sure!"

"Cool, talk to you later." He cuts the call.

Considering the multiple heated discussions we had before I left for basic, this conversation went better than I thought.

I pull up to my parents' house ten minutes late. I hurry to the door knocking before I step inside. "Mom, I'm here." Because of my father's crazy hours as a fire chief, we dinner later than most families, so I feel bad when I can't make it on time.

"In the kitchen, dear."

My mom is in the kitchen, cleaning up from her meal preparations. Not only is she an amazing cook, but she's great at keeping everything clean as she does it. "Sorry I'm late. Is there anything I can do to help?"

"You're fine." Mom hands me a dish of mashed potatoes for the table. "Bring this to the table, please." My sister

Piper comes into the kitchen to help with whatever is left so we can eat.

"Well, well. I'm not the only one who shows up to dinner late." I roll my eyes at my sister. As much as I want to flip her off right now, I refrain. We have had this ongoing battle over the last year or so, and it's getting worse. She can be such a snob sometimes.

"How was your day at camp?" Mom asks once we're all seated. The spread is amazing. She prides herself in making home-cooked, well-balanced meals as often as she can.

"Camp was awesome, mom. The girls were thrilled to see me. We let them sit and ask me questions before we got started on their day."

"That's awesome, but I have a question?" Piper asks with a snide tone as she makes her plate.

"What's that?" Starving, I start making mine as well.

"What are you going to do with your life now that you're home?" This is my sister's way of trying to throw a dig at me because I dance for a living. She says it's a hobby, not a career.

I laugh. "Wow, been home all of five days, and she's already expecting life-altering decisions."

She shrugs. "Well, you did say you were doing this so you could figure your shit out. Did you figure it out?" She glares at me, demanding an answer.

I really want to grab a handful of potatoes from my plate and throw it in her face, but that would be childish, so instead, I reward her with a huge smile. "I want to take online business management courses. I'll look into how the education benefits work when I get to my next drill. For now, I'm taking a little time to get settled. I think I've earned it."

"I think that's a great idea." My father beams at me with pride.

"Thank you, Dad. I figure if I do that, then I can either manage a studio of my own or I can get a job in the

corporate world. I'll be all set no matter which route I take." I shoot daggers at Piper for being so pushy.

"Well done," Mom says. Unfortunately, my sister doesn't agree, she huffs, sulking as she eats her meal.

Situations like this are why I moved out as soon as I could. Being the younger of the two of us, I was babied by my parents, and I got tired of my sister busting my lady balls about it. When Piper is done, she sighs and leaves the table. My parents both glare at me so I follow her to the kitchen where she's rinsing her plate.

I lean on the counter next to her and shake my head. "Why?" She glances over at me. "Why do you feel the need to bust my chops?"

She rolls her eyes. "Isn't it obvious?" She pauses. "You can do no wrong in their eyes. You've always been the perfect princess." She tosses the towel down on the counter.

"First of all, that's not true. Second, you're acting like we're ten. We're both in our twenties and we have amazing parents who gave us a life most could only dream about."

She shrugs. "I guess it's all about perception. You perceive things differently." She walks out of the room leaving me by myself in the kitchen.

A minute later I hear the house door shut and my mom comes in. "What happened?"

I shake my head. "I don't know, Mom. I asked her why she has to treat me the way she does and she gave the same answer she always does." I pause. "I'm going to help you clean up and then I'm heading home."

"Thank you, dear." My mom squeezes my hand in silent support, but it only helps so much. I'm trying to keep things cool between my sister and I for my parents, but a girl can only take so much.

CHAPTER FOUR

JORDAN

“HEY, GIRL,” Meg calls to me as I climb out of the car. We agreed to show up early today to get some things done before the girls show up.

“Hey.” I give her a quick hug. “How’s it going?” I ask her, grabbing my dance bag from the back of the car.

“Great! I have a date this weekend.” She grins ear to ear.

“Oh, really, who’s the lucky guy?” I wiggle my brows at her. Meg had a rough break up a few years ago and swore off men for a bit. I’m glad to hear she has a date. It’ll be good for her.

“A guy I went to school with has moved back to Boston. He looked me up and asked for a date.”

“Cute?” I ask, sticking my key in the front door, letting her in ahead of me. We both enter the parents’ waiting room where there are chairs and a glass window for parents to watch their children take classes.

We’re entering the dance room when Meg stops short, but I’m not paying attention, so bump into her. “What the...” my words trail when I spot a man wearing torn, black jeans and a black beanie, messing with Marianne’s high-end stereo equipment. He has some pieces on the floor, and he’s fumbling with the wires as he pulls more of it apart. He catches our reflection in the mirror and turns toward us.

I step in front of Meg, blocking her from the man before us. “Meg, call 9-1-1,” I whisper, trying to remain calm as I step onto the dance floor.

"Shit, you're not supposed to be here yet." The man growls.

I narrow my eyes at him. It's the same guy who was outside the studio the other day. He must have been watching us.

He runs across the dance floor at me, but my self-defense skills instinctively kick in, and I shove him to the side, readying myself for what he'll do next.

Recovering quickly, he throws a punch at me. I block it and punch back, landing my fist to his stomach. Backing away to maintain space, I watch for his next move. He stares at me, panting from the blow he took to the stomach.

"Leave. I'll unlock the front door, and you can take off." I try negotiating, hoping he'll give up and go, but he doesn't. He comes at me quicker and harder. I block the first punch, but he swings again, backhanding me across the face, and knocking me to the ground. He stands over me and grabs my shirt, looking me in the eye with his cold brown eyes.

"Bitch!" he snarls, then screams in pain when my foot connects with his nuts. I only need to hold him off another minute, and the police should be here. The sound of the sirens alerts him, and he takes off running for the back door to make his escape.

A minute later, two cops burst through the door. "He ran out the back!" I shout, pointing in the direction of the back door.

One cop runs to look for the guy, and one runs over to me squatting beside me. When I look up at him, I'm instantly struck by caring hazel eyes and chiseled cheekbones. He takes a knee beside me and suddenly his brows furrow and his jaw drops. "Private Smith?" he questions, shocked to see me.

My eyes go wide. "Staff Sergeant Summers?" I can't believe of all the cops that could have run into the studio, it's him.

"What happened? Are you okay?" He gently brushes the back of his knuckles across my cheek. His eyes filled with concern, and his voice is soft as silk.

I grin. "It's Jordan, and yeah. I'm fine." I bite my lip taking in his muscular arms and chest. His police uniform shows off his toned body much better than his military uniform.

"My friend Meg and I walked in to open up the studio and there was a guy trying to steal our equipment. He came at me. I tried to keep him here long enough for you to get here but he bolted."

He shakes his head. "That's one heck of a bruise you're getting. Do you have any ice around here?"

I nod. "Yeah, we have those packs you punch to break in the first aid kit. I'll get some in a minute." I lick my lips, still in a trance. I still can't believe it. Out of all the cops that could walk through our door, it's the one man who has haunted my dreams since the day we met.

Our moment is broken when his partner comes running back in, panting, out of breath.

"He's gone." He inhales and exhales a deep breath, trying to get his breathing under control.

Officer Summers pulls away and holds out his hand to help me off the floor. "Officer Lynch, this is Priv..." he stops himself. "This is Jordan Smith."

"You two know each other?" Lynch questions pointing between the two of us.

He looks to his partner. "Yeah, we met before she shipped out to basic training. We're in the same unit."

A huge grin spreads across his partner's face. "Oh, I see. Well, Ms. Smith, can you give us a description of the guy?" I'm not sure what's going down between the two them, but Lynch looks amused.

"Yeah, he was taller than me, maybe five-ten."

"He had dark hair," Meg says, joining our conversation.

I wrap her in a hug. "Thanks for calling the cops. Are you okay?"

"I should be asking you that. Girl, I can't believe you held your own. You were amazing." I shrug, it was no big deal. I simply reacted. "Thank you." She hugs me again. She is clearly shaken up by the event.

"What else can you tell me?" the very attractive Officer Summers asks me.

I sigh. "He had long dark hair, brown eyes. He's average build. I think he was high. His eyes seemed glassy." I continue telling him what happened.

"I'm going to need you to come to the station to give a statement," he informs me.

"Can I call the owner first? She's due here soon, and I want her to be aware of what's happened."

"The owner is here. What the hell happened?" Marianne approaches us. Her eyes go wide when she sees my face. "Jordan, what the hell did you do?" She gently runs the back of her hand over my cheek.

"We walked in on someone breaking into the studio," explains Meg. "The guy came at us, and Jordan used her self-defense training to protect me while I called the cops," Meg continues, defending my actions. Marianne has been like a second mother to me, so I'm not surprised by her reaction to this news.

"Are you out of your ever-loving mind?" she shouts going into mom mode as she often does with us.

"Marianne, honestly, I didn't think. It was a natural reaction." Her jaw drops. "This is what I've been training for," I explain as if it's no big deal. "I guess my military and self-defense training has paid off." I'm proud of myself. Everything I've trained for over the last few years kicked in, and I held my own.

"He could have had a gun!" she yells at me.

"I love you too, Marianne. I'm fine. Please calm down." I wrap her in a quick hug.

When I pull away, she closes her eyes and shakes her head. "Your father is going to kill you."

I shrug. "I'm more concerned about the fact this guy knows my face. I think he's been watching us. He made a comment that we weren't supposed to be here yet, and he looked like the same guy I saw outside the other day."

She sighs. "Fabulous."

"Listen," Officer Summers interrupts, "we have a team that is going to be sticking around to dust for fingerprints. Jordan and Meg need to come with us to give a written statement, and we'll get an officer to drive by from time to time to keep an eye on you, ladies." He looks at me as he finishes his comment.

A smile spreads across my face. "Will that officer be you?"

He smiles back, revealing his confidence. "It most certainly will."

Marianne walks away with a huff, unimpressed by our flirting. Of course, she has no idea I already know Officer Summers. "I'll take care of the equipment," she shouts over her shoulder.

"Please don't touch anything until the officers have completed their investigation," Officer Lynch tells her.

"Okay." She looks at us. "You two go to the station and then go home. You're done here for the day."

"Why?" I ask, blown away that she's sending us home. She's never sent us home.

"Because we can't do anything with the police department here dusting for fingerprints, and you both need rest. Now go," she demands, pointing at the door.

I sigh. "Ready, Officer Summers?" I ask, feeling slightly defeated.

"I'm ready." He and his partner escort Meg and me to their vehicle. He places me in the back seat while his partner escorts Meg to the other side.

I turn to Meg. "Never thought I would experience this."

She giggles. "At least we're not in cuffs, though one of us might like that," she whispers, winking at me. My eyes go wide when I realize she noticed our flirting too.

Officer Summers opens the door for me when we pull up to the police station and helps me out the back of his car.

As we're walking into the building, he says, "So how did basic training go?"

"It went well, actually. It was challenging, but there were parts of it I truly enjoyed."

"I'm not surprised. I could tell from the way you handled those guys on your very first day that you were pretty badass." He winks at me.

"I don't know about badass, but I have been training for years." Lynch pulls the door open. "When we were old enough, my father put my sister and me into martial arts. He was pretty adamant that we be able to protect ourselves." Growing up in Boston isn't easy. My father, being the fire chief, has witnessed some pretty shitty situations and knew he couldn't be with us twenty-four-seven to protect us. I think it was brilliant that he got us into self-defense. I'm a black belt in Taekwondo, and I train Krav Maga.

"That's awesome." He places his hand at the small of my back. His touch sends a slight shiver up my spine. He chuckles. "I can't believe I was the cop sent to the scene."

I smile. "I'd say it's a perfect coincidence."

"Oh, brother." Officer Lynch rolls his eyes and escorts Meg to a room so he can get her statement and Officer Summers pulls a door open for me escorting me to an empty room with a metal table.

It's cold, dark, and dreary. He pulls out one of the two chairs for me. "Is this an interrogation room?" I ask, spinning the ring my father gave me. A nervous habit I've had for years.

"It is, but we use it for things like this too. It's easier to discuss things without all the noise out there." He points

back over his shoulder toward the squad room.

"Oh, okay." I take the offered seat. He sits across from me and writes a few things in his notebook.

He hands me a pad of paper. "Okay, now I need you to give me a full written statement. Jordan, you must include every detail you can think of, from the time you got to work, until the time we got there." I grab it and start to think through as many details as I can remember, start to finish. I'm about halfway done when he's called away.

"I'll be right back, but before I forget," he pulls out his wallet, "Here's my card. My cell number is on there, so you can call me day or night." I look down at the card with a smile, already trying to figure out an excuse to call him. "Jordan, I mean it. I'm here for you if you need me."

I look up at Officer Summers, who is sporting a very sexy smile. "Thanks and you have my number so if you need *anything*, give me a call," I stress the word anything, hoping he gets the hint.

He's about to say more when my father, who undoubtedly pulled some strings to be there, storms into the room. "Please tell me you have a good reason for doing what you did today?" His face is beet red.

"Dad, this is Officer Summers. He came to my rescue today." I totally ignore my father's outburst.

"Thank you for saving my daughter, now if you'll excuse us." He points to the door, informing Officer Summers he needs to leave.

"Yes, sir." The officer shakes my father's hand and walks out of the room.

"Do not avoid my question," my dad warns, hovering over me.

"Daddy, Meg, and I walked into the studio to find a guy messing with the stereo equipment. She froze. All I did was tell her to call 9-1-1, and the rest was instinct when he ran at me."

He runs his hand through his hair in frustration as he paces the room. "He could have had a gun."

I roll my eyes. "What was I supposed to do? We walked in on him." He lets out a deep breath trying to gain an ounce of control. "It was my training. I didn't think. I reacted." I walk over to him. "You've made sure your girls know how to defend themselves, and you know what, I handled myself quite well. His nuts are going to be swollen for a few days."

My dad bursts into laughter. "What am I going to do with you?"

"Love me." I give him a silly smile making him chuckle. "Now, I have to finish this statement and then go get my car. I'm done at work for the day, so I'm going home to chill."

He shakes his head. "Finish up, and I'll take you back to the studio."

"We need to give Meg a ride too," I warn him.

"That's fine."

It only takes me a few minutes to note the rest of what happened. I sign the statement, and then my dad and I walk out of the room into a very busy squad room. It's filled with desks, cops, and detectives busy working.

"Chief Smith. How are you?" A gentleman walks up and holds his hand out to my father.

"I'm well, Lieutenant Savage. How are you?"

"Good. I'm glad to see your daughter didn't get too banged up protecting her friend today."

Officer Summers comes to my defense. "Thanks to her quick reaction, we have a solid description of the guy too."

"Yeah, but we don't have any prints." His partner comes over with Meg in tow. "The crime scene crew notified me that they discovered four sets of prints on the equipment but considering there are four women who work there...he probably wore gloves."

"I didn't notice. I was too busy looking at his face, but now that I think about it." I touch my bruised cheek. "I think he did have gloves on." I look up at Officer Summers. "I'm sorry. I missed that."

"You did plenty." My father encourages me. "Do you gentlemen have everything you need from them? I would like to get these ladies out of here. They've had a long morning."

"They are free to go," the lieutenant informs my father and thanks us for coming in.

On the way back to the studio, we're all quiet, and the tension is thick. There are so many emotions radiating from my father. He's gripping the wheel so hard his knuckles are white, but he won't say a word. "Please don't give me the silent treatment."

"You have no idea how panicked I was when I got the call from Lieutenant Savage that your studio had been broken into while you were there." He stops at a light and turns to me. "My worst nightmares became a reality. So many things could have happened, and I wasn't there to protect you." He's fighting tears threatening to spill over.

"Dad, you're not always going to be there to protect me. That's why you had me take all those classes growing up. That's why I will be going back to classes now that I'm home. We grew up in a tough city hearing about horrible things happening to good people all around us. I love this city, and I wouldn't change one aspect of my life." He pulls away from the stoplight.

We arrive at the studio and spot Marianne inside, so the two of us go in to check on her. As soon as we step through the door, she runs over. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, my cheek is starting to hurt, but I'm fine. Did he take anything?"

"No, he didn't. Thanks to you." She points to the equipment. "But, I need to clean the black dust off of everything." She pauses. "Listen, I know I freaked out on

you. I was concerned. I see you two as if you're my own children, and when I walked in and saw your face swelling, I lost it. Next time, run from the building."

I hug her. "I'm sorry I freaked you out, but honestly, I didn't have a choice but to respond the way I did, and I can't promise I won't do it again." I wink at her.

I turn to my friend. "Meg, I'll see you tomorrow."

She wraps me in a hug. "Thanks for defending us today."

"I'll always have your back."

"Have a good day, ladies." Marianne breaks us up.

"Come on, Dad. I want to go ice my cheek and lay down." I grab my bag and start to walk towards my car, glancing over my shoulder as I climb in and say bye to my father.

When I pull up to my place, I scan the area. A few random people are walking up and down the sidewalk, but nothing seems amiss. Nerves are wracking my body now that I'm alone, and the adrenaline rush has worn off. I scan the area one more time and run from my car into my apartment building. I double-check to ensure the main door into my building is closed properly and run up the stairs to my apartment. I slam the door shut, locking both locks. I press my back to the door and take a few deep breaths trying to gain some control as I glance around my apartment to see everything is in place. It's not like the guy knows who I am or where I live, but it's hard not to worry now that I'm all by myself. It's barely lunchtime, but with everything that has happened, I feel exhausted. The slightest sound has me jumpy as I make my way through my apartment to the kitchen to grab an ice pack. I try to remind myself that there is no one here and head to my room. I need to chill.

CHAPTER

FIVE

GRANT

AFTER A LONG-ASS DAY, Lynch and I are in the locker room changing to go home for the day. I have a date tonight, and if I don't hurry, I'll be late, and I don't do late.

"Dude, is that the girl you met at your unit? She is fucking hot." He slaps me on the chest with the back of his hand.

A pang of jealousy wracks my body at him calling her hot, but I know he means nothing by it. I glance over at him as he changes his shirt. "Yeah, that's her. I told you she's a badass. I can't believe she kicked the dude in the nuts." I shake my head.

"I'd wear a cup around her if I were you." He laughs. "It looks like you need to find an excuse to call her."

I laugh. "I gave her my card with my cell number on it and told her to reach out to me if she needed anything." I wiggle my brows. "If I don't hear from her, you better believe I'll call to check on her. Not to mention, I have every intention of stopping by the studio on Monday to check in on things and ask her to dinner."

He laughs. "Smooth, brother, real smooth!"

"Thanks." I slap him on the arm. "I gotta run, I have a dinner date with Gram tonight."

"Okay, but don't wait too long, a girl like that won't be single forever."

I shake my head. "Later."

I jog out to my car pressing my remote to unlock it. I climb in and exhale a deep breath as I picture Jordan. She is beautiful. The first time I met her, she had her hair pulled back in a bun, but today her silky golden hair was down

framing her gorgeous face, and those curves, man are they perfect. I have no doubt she'll haunt me in my sleep.

I shake my head when my phone alarm chirps, reminding me that I have to get going. As I pull out of my spot, I ask Siri to dial my grandmother's number. I need to let her know that I'm on my way. We try to get together as often as we can. We have set dinner plans every Thursday evening, but sometimes work gets in the way.

I lived with her off and on while my mother was in and out of jail. After my mother left for good my sophomore year of high school, we became very close.

"Hello, dear," she answers my call.

"Hi Gram. I'm on my way to pick up our order and I'll be there."

"Okay, sweetie, take your time." Her soft, gentle voice makes me smile. I cut the call and head straight to our favorite local Thai restaurant. It's up the street from her apartment building, the food is good, and it isn't too expensive considering the location.

Luck is on my side tonight when I find a spot right outside her building. She's lived here for a few years now. As she got older, she had a hard time getting around in her old place because it had a lot of stairs, so I found her an apartment with an elevator.

When I get up to her apartment, Miss Betty, a retired nurse from down the hall, greets me in the hallway. "Good evening, Grant."

"Betty, how are you?" I give her a brief hug.

"I'm well, Grant. How are you?"

"I'm good. Hey, thanks for taking Gram to the doctor the other day." She is the sweetest woman, and she helps me care for my grandmother. I think Betty misses taking care of people since her retirement and enjoys helping me out. With my schedule being the way it is, it's hard for me to get my grandmother to her appointments and keep an eye on her.

"You're most welcome. I wanted to let you know that your grandmother is fine. She does have some severe allergies. The doctor changed her medication and told her if it didn't help to let him know. I've been making sure she takes it daily."

"Thank you so much. I love her dearly, but she is very stubborn and tells me very little about her health. I called her the other night after work to see how her appointment went, and she told me to stop worrying so much. It makes me wonder if she is keeping something from me."

She shakes her head. "She needs to feel like you are focused on your job and not on her. She fears if you're busy worrying about her that you'll end up hurt." She gently pats my arm.

"Okay, well, thank you again for all of your help. I'm not sure I'll ever stop worrying, so I appreciate the updates."

She rewards me with a warm smile. "You're welcome, Grant. Enjoy your dinner."

She wraps me in one last hug, and then I knock on my grandmother's door.

"Get in here, Grant!" she shouts through the door.

I laugh and walk into her home. "Hi, Gram."

Her living room is small, only fitting her favorite recliner, a couch, and a TV. She always sits in her recliner with her feet up. I kiss her on the cheek and grab her TV tray. "I'm going to put our dinner together and grab us utensils and napkins. Be right back."

When I return, Gram asks, "How was your day?"

I smile, thinking about Jordan and her beautiful blue eyes. "It was interesting." Not sure if I should tell her about Jordan yet, so I attempt to change the subject. "How are you feeling? Betty said your appointment went well."

She glares at me, taking a bite of her Pad Thai. "You worry too much. It was fine. What was so interesting about it?" she ping ponged the conversation back to me.

"It's my job to worry." I ping pong it back to her.

"Well, then you've done your job. I'm fine. Now tell me about your day." Gram one, Grant zero, she shuts down my concerns.

I love this woman dearly, but these types of conversations are why I need to make sure I'm checking in with Betty down the hall. At least that way I know, I'm getting the right info. "We were called to a location, a dance studio, for a breaking and entering. When I got there, I found a very stunning, blonde woman lying on the floor with a bruised cheek."

Her eyes go wide. "Was she okay?"

"She was, but the guy got away. He heard us coming and bolted."

"What happened?" She loves hearing stories about my day and the things I go through.

"Apparently, she and one of the other teachers walked in, and the guy was taking some equipment apart. Ms. Smith told her friend to call 9-1-1, and that's when the guy came at her." We're no longer watching the show. She's so interested in the story.

"Dear Lord, those poor girls."

"Gram, she actually fought him off." I dig into my dinner. I'm starving since most days my lunch consists of an apple and a protein bar.

My grandmother's eyes are practically popping her head. "That's crazy."

"I know. I'm glad she had the frame of mind to not only tell her friend to call 9-1-1 but also to use her self-defense training." I chuckle. "From what she told us, she handled herself pretty well."

She shakes her head. "I can't believe she fought him."

"According to her report, she kicked him in the nuts before he ran off."

Gram laughs. "That's hilarious. Good for her."

"She didn't even hesitate. She acted on instinct. It was quite impressive." I've seen many instances where women

have gone through similar training as Jordan but when the time came, they froze.

"That's one brave woman," Gram says with shock.

We both go into a comfortable silence, enjoying our dinner and watching TV. She chose one of the *Blue Collar* episodes. It's one of my favorite ones because, at the end, they have a slideshow with old photos of each of the comedians from their childhood. When it's done, I get up from the couch and put our leftovers in the fridge for Gram to reheat tomorrow. "I have to get going, Gram. Do you need help with anything before I go?"

"No, no. Get out of here." She typically stays up pretty late, so I'm not surprised when she shoos me away.

I laugh and kiss her on the head. "Have a good night, Gram. Call me if you need me."

"I will. Have a good night, dear." I lock the door behind me before heading home.

My phone starts buzzing as I pull up to my apartment. I pull it out to see an unknown number and swipe to answer. "Officer Summers," I answer as I climb out of my car.

"Officer Summers, this is Jordan from the dance studio." Her voice sounds off like she's shaky and nervous. "Are you okay?" I ask, climbing the stairs to my apartment.

"Oh, yes, I'm fine. I'm sorry to bother you, but..." Her words trail.

"It's no bother. I was just getting home. What can I do for you?" I know what I want to do for her, but I'll work on that part later.

"Well, I was lying here thinking about what happened this afternoon. You know, playing it all over in my head. First, I started thinking about what I could have done differently. You know? To stop him from getting away." She pauses like the wheels are still spinning.

"Jordan, you can't do that. You have to let it go, don't let it eat at you. You did far more than most do." I close and lock my apartment door behind me.

"I agree that I can't let this get to me; what's done is done. However, it dawned on me I missed something when I was filling out the report." Her voice is raspy, she's either exhausted or woke up a short time ago.

"Oh yeah? What did you miss?" Using my chin to hold the phone, I pull the hall closet door open and punch in the code for my gun safe. Once it's secure, I grab a bottle of water from the fridge and head to my room, collapsing on my bed to listen to what she has to say.

"He had two marks on his face. One was a scar like he had been hit with something." She sounds more awake now. Her voice is as soft as silk. I could listen to her talk all night long.

"Okay, that's good. Where was the scar?"

"On his right cheekbone. What freaks me out is, I swear I've seen this guy hanging out on the streets around the studio." She pauses. "I can't help but wonder how long he's been watching us."

"Are you sure you're all right?" This is useful information, but the fear in her voice kills me.

"Yeah, I hate that I went from strong and brave to worrying over this guy. If I could only place his face, I would feel so much better."

"Take your time. If you know him, it will come to you when you're ready. You're trying too hard right now, and it's causing a block."

"You're probably right. Anyway, the second mark was a birthmark. It was pink, in the shape of an oval, right above his jawbone. It looked like someone had kissed him on the cheek and left smeared lipstick behind. The mark was also on the right side of his face, below the scar."

"Jordan, that's amazing. I can't believe you remember all of that."

She sighs. "It came to me while I was sleeping. I had a nightmare about it and it woke me up. The last thing I

remembered was that he was wearing gloves. They were black latex. Very tight on his hands.”

“This is all great info, but I’m sorry it came to you in a nightmare. I hope you don’t have any more of them. I made a note of everything you’ve described, and I’ll update the file when I get in tomorrow. Is there anything else you can think of?” I don’t want to end our call yet. Her soft silky voice does things to me. I’ve never been one for phone conversations, but with her, it’s different. Her shy smile and the way she played with her ring while we sat there talking brings a smile to my face.

She lets out a frustrated sigh. “No. I wish I had more, but I don’t.”

“It’s all good. You did great. You gave us a solid description already.”

“Cool, but why would someone with such distinguishing marks risk getting caught?” She sounds like she’s been thinking this through.

“Lord knows. Some people are just so desperate for money that it doesn’t matter to them. They’ll do whatever they have it takes to get by.” I shake my head as if she can see me. “Do me a favor, though. If you see him, don’t approach him. Call me or dial 9-1-1 immediately. This guy knows your face, and he is fully aware you’ve seen him. If he is desperate, there’s no telling what he will do.”

“I know. That’s been on my mind too.” She sighs once again.

I close my eyes, realizing I scared the shit out of her. “I don’t mean to scare you. I just want you to be cautious.”

“I get it. I think I’m going to chill at home this weekend so I’m ready for work Monday.”

“Good idea. I’ll check in on you next week, but in the meantime, I’m glad you feel comfortable calling me. If you need anything or you want to talk about it, give me a call.”

“Thank you, Officer Summers. I’m so glad it was you that showed up at the studio today. It definitely helped.” I can

hear her smiling through the phone. Flashbacks remind me of what a beautiful smile it is.

"Please, call me Grant, and I'm glad I was the one to show up too."

She chuckles. "Okay, thank you, Grant."

"You're most welcome." I wish I had more to say, but I can't think of anything else at the moment and as much as I want to ask her out, I don't think it's the right time. "Have a good night, Jordan."

"You too." I cut the call with a huge goofy grin on my face.

How the hell am I going to bring myself to ask this beautiful, brave woman out? I shake off my thoughts and get my shit together for the extra shift I picked up tomorrow.

CHAPTER

SIX

JORDAN

THE SUN IS BARELY UP, and there's an eerie feeling in the air. Before I step out of my car, I glance around, taking in my surroundings. All is quiet outside the studio except for a woman walking her dog. My trembling body tells me I truly need the self-defense class I'm taking tonight. I thought coming back to work would be no big deal, but I was incredibly wrong. I've spent the entire weekend locked in my apartment with thoughts of this guy running through my head like a movie, set on repeat. No matter how hard I tried to block him out, he kept creeping back in.

It takes me a minute to convince myself that all will be fine before I climb out of the car and jog over to the studio door. Nerves are making it nearly impossible for me to unlock it with the new key that Marianne dropped off on Saturday. When I finally get it open, I hurry inside, slamming the door closed and securing it behind me.

With my back pressed to the door, I wring out my shaking hands and let out a deep breath, trying to gain some control over my emotions. This is harder than I thought it would be. I grab my newly acquired mace and inspect every door and every closet of the studio. Once I've confirmed everything is secure, I feel my body start to relax.

Marianne and Meg should be here shortly. In the meantime, I change my clothes and continue shaking out my jitters. I start stretching at the ballet bar to warm up and occupy my mind. *I am not afraid. I am not afraid. I am strong.* I repeat in my head, trying to build my confidence back up.

There's no camp this week, but we have to work on a song list for the upcoming dance season. Between camp and planning, our summer goes by incredibly fast, and before we know it, we'll have registration for the fall season.

I slip into a split on the dance floor to continue my stretching routine. There's a knock at the front door that scares the ever-loving shit out of me. From this angle I can see someone is out there but I can't see who it is. My heart races as I slowly approach the door. When I see Grant standing there in shorts and a nicely fitted t-shirt, I puff out my cheeks trying to calm my trembling body before I let him in. "Good morning, Grant, is everything okay?" My voice is shaky.

"I should be asking you that since I scared you. I'm sorry." A slight blush stains his handsome face. His hazel eyes connect with mine as he runs his fingers through his thick, light brown hair.

"It's fine. I'm obviously a bit jumpy being here by myself so soon after the incident. It's amazing how strong you can be in the moment, but then your mind runs away with you after all is said and done." Lord have mercy, my heart is beating so hard it feels like it's about to pop out of my chest.

"I hear ya. I'm on my way to the station and thought I would stop in to check on things, you know, make sure no one has come back to mess with the studio." He grins. "When I looked inside, I caught a glimpse of you from the door and figured I would see how you're doing." I'm glad he did. He is amazingly attractive in uniform, but seeing his firm body in regular clothes is not a bad way to start my morning, even if he did scare me.

"I'm okay. Like I said, just a little nervous coming in." I bite my lip bashfully. I'm not usually shy with guys, but he is seriously hot, and I think it's incredibly sweet he stopped by.

"Cool." He looks like he wants to say more, but he doesn't.

"What is it?" I ask him, not wanting the conversation to end. He stares at me for a moment, making me nervous. "Please, tell me if you have any information I should know..."

He quickly shakes his head. "No, it's not that, we're still on the lookout for the guy." He pauses again. "Listen, would you be interested in grabbing dinner with me?"

"Grant Summers, are you asking me on a date?"

I laugh. "It sure sounds that way." The blush that colors his cheeks is sweet.

"Is that a good idea? We could get into trouble." Being in the same unit together, we shouldn't date. I could care less at this point. He has my lady bits a tingling mess, but I want to mess with him.

He rolls his eyes. "We're not in the same section." He shrugs. "And if it becomes serious between us and it's an issue, then I'm willing to transfer for a beautiful woman like you."

My smile grows, and my cheeks heat. "Are you trying to make me blush?"

He shakes his head. "I don't know what you're talking about. I'm telling it like it is."

"I would love to have dinner with you." There is no way I am turning this man down. He makes me all flustered.

He steps closer, placing his hand on my arm and looks into my eyes. His touch and smoldering eyes sets me on fire. "Great. I'll text you to make plans. I gotta run so I'm not late, but I'll stop by again to keep an eye on you, ladies."

"Thanks. I really appreciate it."

"It's not a problem." I silently beg him to kiss me. I want to feel those full lips against mine, but he breaks eye contact and heads for the door. He pushes the door open but turns back to me. "Have a good day, Jordan."

I'm not sure how I manage to be so brave, but I step outside with him, not wanting our time to end. "You too, Grant."

"Make sure you lock this door until someone else is here with you."

"I will." He winks and then jogs across the street to his car.

I'm about to close the door when I hear, "Jordan, hold up." Sloan is running toward the studio.

"Sloan, what are you doing here? Shouldn't you be at work?"

"I'm on my way, but I wanted to check on you. Are you okay?" He looks down into my eyes.

"I'm fine." *How in God's creation did he hear about what happened?*

"I heard about the break-in and that you were here when it happened. I can't believe you fought this guy!" One more person angry with me, that's just what I need.

I plant my hands on my hips. "How do you know what happened?" I only told Kendra and Jodi.

"I was at the pool hall hanging with some friends from work. I saw Kendra and her boyfriend. When I asked her where you were, she instantly became uneasy, trying to figure out what to say." He shakes his head. "She's not a very good liar. I knew right away that she was trying to make something up. I told her I wasn't leaving until she told me what happened. She eventually spilled and gave me all the deets on what went down." He lifts his hand to my slightly bruised cheek. His touch is caring but doesn't feel right. The electricity I felt when Grant touched me isn't there. Grant gives me butterflies, and the pull between us was instant. I felt something I had never felt before. Sloan's touch feels... inappropriate.

I narrow my eyes. "If you were so worried, why didn't you call or stop by my apartment?" I'm not sure why but I go from confused to angry. Now, all of a sudden, he's worried.

"Kendra asked me not to bother you Saturday night. She said you needed rest, and I worked all day yesterday."

"I'm good. There's no need to worry," I assure him, noting that Grant never pulled away. He's watching from his car to make sure I'm safe.

I'm not sure what's happening with Sloan, but things have definitely not been the same since he took this job at the gaming store. At one point in our friendship, nothing would have stopped him from checking on me. We were like brother and sister. He has always been protective of me.

Grant jogs back over. "Jordan, is everything okay?"

"Grant, this is my friend, Sloan." Grant holds his hand out to Sloan. Sloan is hesitant at first but finally shakes his hand.

"I got her, man. She's fine." Sloan tries to step between us, but that's not going to fly with Grant.

Grant steps around him. "Excuse me, but I'm a police officer, not to mention the one who responded to the 9-1-1 call, so no offense, but I'll let her determine if she's fine." He turns to me, waiting for a response.

His hazel eyes bore deep into my eyes as if reading my soul, he asks, "Are you good? I can ask him to leave if you want." It blows me away how attuned he is to my discomfort. He reads me like an open book, making me even more aware of the connection we have. It sends a shiver up my spine.

He refuses to break contact until I give him a response. Lost in a sea of thoughts, it takes me a minute, but I finally reply with a warm smile, "It's fine. Thank you, though."

He gives me a slight nod. "You have a good day then, and I'll talk to you later." He winks at me once again.

I bite my lip, trying to fight the huge smile on my face as I reply, "You too, Grant." He heads back to his car.

"Thanks for checking on me, Sloan, but I'm fine. I gotta go. I'll talk to you soon." He's fidgeting uncomfortably after witnessing the interaction between Grant and me.

I can see he's about to argue with me when Marianne walks up. "Hey, Sloan," she greets him and then looks at me

with her brows furrowed.

"Is everything okay? I saw Officer Summers get in his car."

"We're good. He stopped by on his way to the station to check on the studio, and Sloan popped in to see if I was okay, but he's leaving as well."

He nods slightly. "I'm glad you're okay. Call me if you need anything." Sloan grumbles with disappointment.

"Thanks, I will."

He jogs down the street to his waiting car.

Marianne and I head back inside. "What is up with you and Sloan?"

I sigh in frustration. "Nothing. I think he wants more from me than I can give. He asked me to dinner the other day, but I turned him down because I already had plans with my parents, but I could sense his disappointment."

"You looked very uncomfortable." She closes the door behind us but leaves it unlocked so Meg can get in.

I shrug. "I guess I am a little. His fingers grazed my cheek, and it didn't feel right to me. Something is up with him, and I don't know what it is or how to handle it. I don't want to hurt him. He's a great guy, but I'm not interested in dating him." I smile. "It doesn't help that I'm incredibly attracted to Grant, who, by the way, asked me to dinner, and the testosterone match that took place between them was intense."

"Listen, Jordan. I think you should be careful. I've watched you and Sloan grow up together, and I agree that he has changed quite a bit over the last year or so. Keeping a little distance between the two of you may be good, he doesn't seem like the fun guy who used to pick you up. He makes me a bit nervous now."

I need to lighten the mood slightly, so I shoot her a wink. "I got this. Things are awkward between us now, but I'm sure they'll blow over. Besides, I think I proved I can handle myself." I wiggle my brows. "And I'm back to working with

Mateo tonight." I silently plead with her to drop it. I don't want to discuss this anymore.

She nods, letting it go, as Meg walks through the door. "Good morning, ladies," she sings full of cheer.

"Good morning, and now that we're all here, let's sit and talk music for this year's show."

Meg pouts. "Wow, all business today."

We all take a seat in the center of the floor. Marianne opens the notebook in her hands, ready to write as she looks up at Meg. "Is there something else you'd like to discuss?"

She shrugs, unsure what to say. Her eyes bounce between Marianne and me, but she turns back to me and narrows her eyes. "What did I miss?"

I roll my eyes. "Nothing major. Grant and Sloan were just here, no big deal."

She narrows her eyes at me. I let out a sigh. "Sloan is acting funny, and Grant asked me to dinner," I ramble out, trying to move past this conversation.

"That man needs to find himself a girlfriend. He sweats you way too hard." She shakes her head. "What you need is some distance between the two of you." Her sass makes me want to laugh.

"Yeah, that worked out well." I roll my eyes. "I've been gone for eighteen weeks."

She laughs. "True, but you still need to watch him."

"Okay, so we all agree about Sloan, now let's see if we can agree on some music. We need a theme for this year." Marianne bites the end of her pen.

"It's our thirty-fifth anniversary. We should celebrate, do something fun." Marianne has been in business since she graduated from college. Her parents helped her start this studio as her graduation gift.

"I say we do a throwback and use eighties music." I wiggle my brows.

"That could be fun. The girls can wear leg warmers and bright colored clothes," adds Meg. We all pull out our phones and start to research songs from the eighties that would work for us.

After a long day of researching and debating various songs for different age groups, we've accomplished a lot, but I'm tired and still have one more thing I have to do today. I need to meet with my trainer. I need him to keep me in tip-top shape and prepared for anything.

When I walk into the Community Center where Mateo trains his clients, I stop, taking it all in. I haven't been here since I've been home, and I've missed this place. The center is huge. They have a boxing ring, a huge area of mats for self-defense, a martial arts training area, and weights for working out.

Scanning the huge room, I smile when I spot my trainer, Mateo. He is on the last mat finishing up with another female client. She gets distracted by my approach, and Mateo takes total advantage, attacking her and slamming her down onto the mat. "Keep your focus on me," he growls at her. She closes her eyes and pounds the mat frustrated. Climbing off, he laughs as he helps her up. "Get out of here." She says nothing as she storms off toward the locker room.

"Still being a dick, I see." I approach my friend with a smile.

"Watch who you're calling a dick. I'm working with you next." He wraps me in a sweaty hug. "It's good to see you."

"You too, Mateo."

"How's your dad?" he asks with a huge smile. Mateo has been like family since he started training my sister and me.

"Still a worrywart." I laugh.

"From the looks of things, he has room for concern." He opens a bottle of water, chugging half of it.

"Let me guess, he told you?" I plant my hands on my hips.

"He's worried about you." He caps his water. "Asked me to call to schedule an appointment with you if I hadn't heard from you by the end of the week." I shake my head. "You called later that day. I'm willing to bet you have some fears about the situation you don't want to admit to," he says with a pant.

"Are we here to talk or to train?" I have known Mateo for a long time. I don't need to be reminded of the danger that lurks due to my bravery or stupidity, depending on who you ask.

"Okay, I get the message, let's train." He takes a step back and says, "Warm up with fifty jumping jacks, fifty crunches, and fifty pushups. Go!" I want to sass him and tell him that I'm already warmed up since I came straight from dance class, but I decide against it. We didn't do much dancing today and I'm rusty. I don't want to get my ass kicked.

While I get to work on my warm-up, he drinks more water and walks around the mat, watching me. It makes me nervous and has my senses on alert. I can't help but wonder if he's going to attack me while I'm working out, so I keep an eye on him.

As soon as I finish, we go into some hand drills to warm up a little more. It's simple stuff, but he comes at me so fast it makes deflecting his punches hard. I'm out of practice because I haven't been here since before I left for boot camp. We did a little hand-to-hand combat training, but nothing like I do when I'm here with Mateo. This is true self-defense training.

He throws a jab, I miss, and he connects with my stomach. "A little slow since you've last been here."

I'm bent over with my hands on my knees, trying to catch my breath. "I don't think I did that bad considering it's been what, a little over four months since our last session?"

"Tell me tomorrow if you still feel the same way." I roll my eyes. "Grab some water, and let's get back to work."

We work out hard for the next forty-five minutes. At the end of the session, I'm exhausted and dripping with sweat. It feels good to be back. I grab my towel and wipe down my face. "That was just what I needed. I'll see you again on Thursday?"

"You will." He nods his agreement.

"Cool." I put my bag over my shoulder.

"Wait up. I'll walk you out," Mateo calls out, stopping me.

I shake my head. "I'm good." I start toward the door, but he runs up behind me.

"You're my last client, let me walk you to your car." I stop and turn back to him with my eyebrow quirked. "I would feel better," he demands.

I roll my eyes once again. "Okay, fine. If it will make you feel better." He pushes the door open for me. The second we are outside, I shudder, and the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. I scan the lot, noting who is in the immediate area, and then spot someone leaning on my car. I narrow my eyes as Mateo asks, "Who's that?"

I sigh. "It's my friend Sloan." We walk over to my car. Mateo stays by my side while he waits to see what will happen. "What are you doing here, Sloan?" I'm trying to remain calm, but in reality, I'm getting annoyed.

"I followed you from the studio so I could make sure you got home okay, but you came here instead." He nods toward Mateo. "First, a cop, now a gym rat?"

My eyes go wide. "You know damn well that Mateo is my trainer." I snap at him with frustration. "What has gotten into you lately? Every time I see you, you're behaving weirder and weirder."

"I'm weird because I care?" He pounds his fist on my car, causing me to jump. Sloan has never been an angry guy, so he's freaking me out slightly.

"This is more than caring. You're angry, and I have no idea why. I have done nothing wrong."

He stares at me for a moment. "You're kidding me, right?"

"What?" I practically scream. "Talk to me."

"Come on, Jordan. Are you that blind? I asked to take you out to dinner multiple times before you left and again since you've been back." He's totally frustrated.

I sigh. "I'm sorry, Sloan, but I thought you were asking as friends. I mean, I had an idea that maybe you wanted more, but you never came out and said anything, so I thought I imagined it."

He steps closer and smiles. "Now that you know, what do you say?"

I shake my head and close my eyes, trying to figure out how to let him down gently. "I'm sorry, Sloan. I don't think of you that way." I don't know what else to say.

He looks to Mateo and then back to me. Without another word, he storms off.

My sweaty body trembles in the cool air. I'm typically the strong one in our group, and it's time I get that back. I close my eyes and exhale a deep breath trying to calm myself, that was draining.

"Are you okay?" Mateo asks gently.

"Yeah, I just want to get home."

"Well, I'm glad I walked you to your car." He bumps me with his shoulder, trying to lighten the situation.

"Me too." My words are soft as I fight past the lump in my throat. Mateo pulls open the car door for me. "Thanks, Mateo." I climb in and close it. My hand instantly goes for the button to lock me in the car.

I start the car and am about to pull away when I get a text from Grant.

Grant: I hope you had a great day!

Jordan: I did. I'm leaving the gym now. I'm on my way home. How was your day?

My phone rings as I pull out of the lot. I press the button on my steering wheel. "Hello, Officer Summers," I tease.

He laughs, a sound I find incredibly comforting. "Hello, Private Smith." We have a connection, and I'm quite confident I'm not the only one who feels it.

"What are you up to?" I ask. There is something so calming about him. I hear his voice and I'm instantly in a better place.

"I was hoping we could plan our date."

"Oh, you were huh? What if I changed my mind?" I tease him, stopping at a stop sign.

He chuckles. "I'd have to tell you that I don't give up that easy."

I turn down my street and start scanning for a parking spot. I climb out of my car as a male descends the steps. I hate that I'm leery of every male who crosses my path, but I can't help it.

My cheeks hurt from smiling so hard. "I'm glad to hear that. I would love to plan our date."

I unlock the door to my building and begin my trek to the third floor. "What do you like to do?"

"I should be asking you that." I love how he is more concerned about doing something that I enjoy doing.

We had a great conversation about shooting pool during lunch on my first drill weekend. I remember him telling me how competitive he and his friends are. "How do you feel about getting together with some of our friends at the pool hall? I know it wouldn't be much of a date since our friends would be with us, but it would give us a chance to get to

know each other." My father has always been leery of us dating cops. I need to see him out with his friends. See what kind of guy he is before I get all swept up in the knight in shining armor bit.

He chuckles. "I'll agree under one condition."

"What's that?" I ask.

"You plan an actual date with me after this."

I laugh. "Agreed."

"Then I'll get some of my crew together."

"Great! I'll see you Saturday around six."

"Sounds good. Have a good night, Grant." I'm smiling ear to ear.

"You too." He cuts the call as I get to my apartment, where I find an envelope pinned to the door. Feeling slightly insecure, I step inside, lock the door and open the envelope expecting something from my landlord. I silently pray he isn't increasing my rent. I barely make it on my own now, but my eyes go wide when I find an image of myself at the studio a few hours ago and written across the top says, **You're beautiful when you dance.**

What the fuck?

Does this guy know where I live? My heart races as I look over the image of me with a huge smile on my face doing what I love. I instantly reach behind me ensuring the door is locked and I toss the image in the trash. I don't know who this guy is but he's not going to control my life.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GRANT

"HEY MAN, what's up with you?" Levi, a fellow cop and one of my best friends, slaps me on the chest as I glance down at my watch. It's a little after six. "It's like you're not here." He follows me around the table.

"I'm good." I step up to the pool table, take my shot, but miss.

"Yeah, okay. If you're good, why'd you miss an easy shot?" I roll my eyes, but he's right, it's not a shot I would typically miss.

We both step aside and watch as others take their turn.
"Is this about that girl?"

I sigh. "I feel like she's going to stand me up. She told me she'd be here at six, and it's almost six-thirty." He smiles. "I know, I know. Part of me is mad for even feeling this way about a woman I hardly know, but I'm telling you she's different."

He shrugs. "Maybe she is, and maybe she has a good excuse for being late."

"I hope she's okay. I don't want to sound like a freaking stalker calling her to ask where she is, but at the same time, I'm a little worried."

"Give her a few more minutes, and if she's not here, shoot her a text," he suggests.

"Yeah, okay."

I stare at the pool table as others play, not paying attention to the game. Levi is right. My head is so filled with Jordan I'm not on my game at all.

It comes back to my turn. "Okay, stargazer. Let's see if you can manage to sink our last two balls and save this

game for us." Grayson, another fellow cop, busts my balls.

"Fuck you, man. It's been a crazy week."

He nods his head. "I'm sure it has, junior deputy. Just save the game, will ya?" I flip him off and take my first shot, sinking it. I lean over to line myself up for my next shot. As I pull the stick back to take my shot, beautiful curvy hips step in front of my line of sight. My eyes rake over her flat stomach, up past her perky breasts. My eyes lock in on the most beautiful, bold blue eyes I've ever seen.

With a gorgeous, full-on megawatt smile, she says, "I'm sorry. Did I distract you, Officer Summers?" she teases, knowing full well I want her to call me Grant.

"You could say that." I shake my head and take the shot but miss it. Grayson's grumbling something behind me, but I don't give a fuck because I'm thrilled that she's here. "And I thought we were past the 'Officer Summers' stuff?" I lean my pool stick against the wall and guide her away from my group so I can have a minute alone before I introduce her.

"We are, but I like messing with you. It's too easy." She giggles.

I shake my head with a grin. I love her sass. "You had me a little worried. Is everything okay?"

I smile. "Everything is good. I'm sorry I'm late, my girl Jodi is our designated driver, and she was running behind."

"No worries. I'm glad everything is okay. Grab your friends, and we'll do introductions."

She waves her friends over. It's a good thing I reserved a second table because there are four of them and six of us.

I point to Grayson. "You see that guy over there with the beard?" She nods. "That's Grayson." Grayson nods a hello. "He's extremely competitive and very mad that I just blew the game on account of a pretty lady."

"Stop." She slaps me playfully and then suddenly gets quiet.

We continue our introductions and break off into teams. Jordan, myself, Lynch, and his wife Mary are playing against

Jodi, her sister Piper, Levi, and his wife.

The others gather around the other table and start a game of their own. "I fancy myself quite the pool player." She grabs a stick and the cue ball.

Lynch looks at her in shock as she leans over the table to take the first shot. She hits the cue ball slightly off center, sending the others scattering around the table, sinking a solid. "Solids it is," I tell Lynch.

"It's a good thing we're partners," I whisper in her ear.

"Oh yeah?" she bites her lip and contemplates what to say.

"Yeah, you're quite the distraction."

She looks up into my eyes. "Please do your best to focus. I, too, am not a fan of losing."

I throw my head back in laughter. "Okay, I see how it is."

Pool is not Lynch and Mary's thing. They come here to spend time with the team and to get away from the kids, but they aren't very good. We beat them rather quickly, and so we decide to switch things up a bit. Lynch and Mary sit out and grab a bite to eat. We decide to play Me, Levi, and his wife against Jordan, Piper, and Jodi.

Jordan once again grabs the cue ball. "Now, you can lose all of your focus." She bumps me with her hip as she walks by.

I can't help but laugh. She is amazingly sexy, and I know this is going to be a tough round. She leans over the table showing me her perfectly round ass. My dick instantly begins to stir. I step away, trying to maintain some control because the thoughts running through my head will only get me in trouble.

"Focus," Levi demands.

"Stripes." Jordan winks and walks away. I scan the table looking for my shot.

As I move around the table, she positions herself on the opposite side, ensuring she is in my line of sight. "You're playing dirty," I warn.

"I have no idea what you're talking about." She bats her lashes acting innocent.

I nod my head. "Okay." I lean over and take my shot, sinking it but miss the next one. Jodi steps up to take her shot, but I'm not sticking around to watch. I grab Jordan's hand and pull her into the corner. I pick her up onto the stool and stand between her legs.

"Have dinner with me," I demand.

"I'm not sure that's a good idea. My daddy says cops make for shady boyfriends." She tries to be serious but she fails.

"All of the guys here are cops and are all very committed to their girlfriends or wives. You can't lump us all together."

"Oh yeah?" She bites her lip once again, making me want to bite it myself.

"Yeah. Come on. It's just dinner, besides you promised."

I slip my fingers into her hair at the nape of her neck. Her eyes lock on mine. I want so bad to kiss her plump lips, but our moment is broken when Levi slaps me on the arm.

"Hey. Do you know that guy?"

We both look over toward the other table to see Sloan standing there talking to Jodi and Piper.

Jordan sighs. "I do, that's Sloan." She jumps down from the stool and walks over. He wraps her in a hug.

That pang of jealousy I noticed from the other day is back.

Reading Levi's thoughts, I fill him in. "I met him briefly at the studio the other morning when I stopped in to check on her." I narrow my eyes, watching as he pulls her to the end of the pool table.

Her brows furrow and she pushes him back slightly.

He steps back into her personal space, making me nervous. I take the few large steps needed to be by her side.

"So that's the issue, you're dating the cop!" he yells in her face.

"Yes, she's dating the cop. Do you have a problem with that?" She looks around him to see me coming up beside her.

"Hey, Grant," she says as I put my arm around her, tucking her into my side. I want him to know she's mine.

"Dude, why do you keep popping up everywhere she's at. Stalking her?" Sloan looks as if he's ready to swing at me.

I laugh. "We're here playing pool together. We're on a date with our friends. You're the one who just walked in, and from what I can see, you're causing trouble."

"I'm not causing trouble. I came here to play pool with my friends." He points over his shoulder, defending himself.

"Really? Because I'm pretty sure I heard you yelling at my girl."

He shakes his head. "I asked her to dinner the other night, and she turned me down. She didn't mention a boyfriend."

"Not that I have to explain myself, Sloan, but we hadn't agreed to go out yet," Jordan fills him in.

He nods and puts his hands up in a defensive manner. "My bad."

"What are you on?" I ask him, noting his eyes are glassy and he's fidgeting, but he doesn't smell of pot.

"I don't have to tell you shit." Dude is getting nervous. He must have taken something just before getting here. "Jordan, listen. We need to talk. Let me take you to dinner."

She shakes her head. "Sorry, Sloan. I'm not sure that's a good idea. Why don't you tell me whatever it is you have to say right now."

"Fine." he growls frustrated that she turned him down once again. "Some guys were in the store today. I overheard them talking about the break-in and how it didn't go well. They're nervous because you know the guy's face. I kept a close eye on them because I didn't want them to lift anything from the store."

"You didn't think to call the cops, so I don't know, maybe we could arrest them?" I interrupted his story, furious that this dick head cared more about his store than his friend.

"Fuck you. We aren't allowed to carry our cell phones while we're working, and I wasn't leaving them alone to steal from my store." He gets in my face.

"You care more about the games in your store than your friend?" I want to punch this dude in the face.

"Fuck you. You don't know shit about me." He steps up to me.

"I know you're high as a kite right now." I gently step around Jordan to put space between them. I don't trust this guy.

"So? You're not here as a cop. There's nothing you can do about it." He steps even closer so our noses are practically touching.

I narrow my eyes at him. "You think because I'm not in uniform, I can't have you arrested?" This guy is such a dope.

Levi comes over. "Is everything alright over here?"

That's when Sloan realizes he's outnumbered. "What, you're all going to gang up on me now?" He puts some distance between us as he scans the room.

We need to get him under control and quick. "Listen, we can detain you and call for backup, but we're going to give you a chance to walk away. I suggest you take off before we change our minds and make a phone call," Levi warns him.

"Let me guess, another tough-guy cop. Boston's finest." He chuckles.

"You've got three seconds to walk out that door before I change my mind," I warn him.

"I don't want any trouble." He puts his hands up in a defensive manner. "As I said, I just wanted to take my girl to dinner so I could let her know that two guys were discussing the break-in. I don't even know if it was the same

guy." He looks back to Jordan. "Watch your back." He turns and leaves without saying another word.

Jordan's body trembles. "Are you okay?" I ask her.

"Yeah. He asked me to dinner, but I told him that I had agreed to dinner with you, so I didn't think it was a good idea. He lost it." She sighs. "I guess it's a good thing I've gone back to my self-defense classes." She tries to brush it off, but she's failing.

"Listen, why don't I stay at your place tonight?" Jodi offers.

Jordan nods. "Can we get out of here?" she asks.

"Sure." Jodi agrees.

Jordan pulls out her wallet to pay her bill, but I refuse it. "I got it. Would you feel better if I followed you two home?"

She shakes her head. "No. I'll be fine with Jodi."

"Dinner. Tuesday?" I ask, trying to confirm the plans we were about to make. She gives me a weak smile and nods. "Come on. We'll walk you to your car." Levi and I walk the girls out.

Jordan climbs into the front passenger seat and lowers the window. "Thanks. I had fun tonight."

"Me too. Do me a favor and text me when you get home, so I know you're safe."

She smiles. "Sure. Have a good night, Grant."

"You too." Her friend pulls out of the parking lot, and Levi and I go back in to finish our game.

On the way, he makes sure to bust my balls. "Dude, you got it bad."

"What are you talking about?" I stop outside the door.

"I saw the way you stormed over there. I swore you were going to kill the guy."

I shake my head. "He showed up at the studio the other day when I went to check on things. She introduced him as her friend, but things didn't seem right to me. Their interaction looked awkward. Dude needs to leave her alone."

Levi laughs. "I hate to tell you, but he doesn't seem to be the type to simply disappear."

I sigh and pull the door open. "I thought the same thing."

"Well, let's hope he's not involved with the B&E. Someone would have to be pretty stupid to discuss that kind of shit openly. And seriously, who doesn't call the cops? Something's not adding up."

"You're right. I think it's time we do some digging on this guy." We drop the subject as we approach our pool table.

CHAPTER

EIGHT

JORDAN

IT'S time for our family dinner, but fear has me frozen in my car. I narrow my eyes at my parents' beautiful brownstone, the home my sister and I grew up in. My heart is pounding in my chest. The panic attacks I thought were under control, hit me hard when I'm out alone at night. I'm parked directly across the street, but the house feels as though it's a mile away. I try to gain some composure, but it's not working. I shake out my jitters and exit the car, running across the street as fast as I can. As I approach the steps, I hear tires squeal behind me. I jump to see what is happening as a car comes flying around the corner. My hands tremble as I stick my key in the lock and hurry inside. "Mom...Dad...I'm here." The aroma of mom's home-cooked meal settles me. I inhale taking a few calming breaths before I face my parents.

Mom always makes comfort foods for dinner when my sister and I are over. The smell of pot roast fills the air, making my heart happy, and my stomach rumble. "You're early," my dad notices, wrapping me in a hug.

"Yeah, I was bored sitting at home. I miss having a roommate sometimes." A smile spreads across his face. "What?"

"I can't believe you just said that." He chuckles.

"Why?" My brows furrow.

"Do you remember Chief Johnson?"

"Yeah, isn't he in district seven?" I ask, confused.

My father nods. "He is. His daughter, Cory, graduated from college this past May."

Things are going well for her now that she has landed a job. She's looking for a roommate. I told him you had a room available in your apartment and that I would talk to you about it."

"Really?" I can't believe it. I had been thinking about how much I miss having someone to come home to. "That's cool." Kendra used to be my roommate but she and her boyfriend decided it was time they moved in together. "When Kendra first moved out, I was excited to have the place to myself. The privacy is nice, but I miss having someone to talk to and hang out with."

"Yeah, Cory has a full-time job as an executive assistant and wants to get out of her parents' house."

"I'm down with meeting her."

"Good, because I already gave Chief Johnson all the info as far as how much the rent would be. I told him you and his daughter could work out the rest, as far as the utilities and food." My father is grinning from ear to ear.

I give him my signature one eyebrow look. "How did you know I would agree to this? I mean, I've never met her, and now she's moving into my apartment." I shake my head.

His brows jump up. "I didn't promise anything. I gave him the info along with your number and told him I was quite confident you would be interested." He shrugs. "Call it gut instincts."

I'm about to say more when my sister's voice rings out. "Oh no, Dad's gut feeling is at it again?" Piper comes walking into the room. "Is this gut feeling in regards to your date Tuesday night?" She gives me a snide grin knowing exactly what she just did.

My head whips around to my sister. She knows our father is way overprotective, and now she has thrown me under the bus and I'm going to have to tell him about Grant.

"What date? You didn't mention any date." I know where I got that one eyebrow look from because he's giving it

right back to me.

"No, I didn't because it's just a date, and I don't know if there will be a second." I try brushing it off.

"You mean a third since we were playing pool with him last night." She gives me a snide grin.

"You went out with some random guy and didn't say anything?" My father growls in frustration.

"Daddy, he isn't some random guy. He is the cop I met at my unit who also happened to be at the break-in, and I was with friends, so no, I didn't go out with him alone." I walk past my sister, mumbling. "Thanks, Piper."

My sister giggles and starts telling my father about Grant, like she knows much of anything. She only knows about him because she happened to be at the pool hall with us last night, and that was a one-off. She never goes out with us. She acts like she's too good to hang out in a pool hall. Hearing her talk with my father makes me wonder if she only came so she could throw me under the bus with him. She is forever trying to get me into trouble.

Mom and I get to work, bringing dinner to the table. We all sit, and Mom says grace. The second she's done, my dad starts in on me. "So, tell me about this Grant guy."

"He's a cop. Like I mentioned before, the one that arrived at the studio after it was broken into." I smile and bite my lip. "He's sweet. He wanted to get together with me and so I suggested we play pool as a group." I shrug as if it's no big deal because it wasn't.

"You know how I feel about cops," my father warns.

"Daddy, it's not like I went there alone. You should be happy we met with other people around. It gave me a chance to get to know him a little better before we go out alone on Tuesday. Besides, this isn't your life to live. It's mine, and just because one or two cops end up cheaters doesn't mean they're all bad."

"Okay. If he's not bad, then you'll invite him to dinner next Sunday, then we can meet him." His words are

demanding.

"What if I decide after our date that I don't want to see him again?" I throwback frustrated he's already making such requests.

"Yeah, like that's going to happen. I saw you with him at the pool hall. There was some heat coming from you two." My sister fans her face. "It was very sweet how he came to your rescue." Piper is loving this.

My father drops his fork. "Why did you need rescuing?" His glares at me his eyes wide.

I want to throat punch my sister right now, but I settle for a look that screams *really*. Just once, could she keep her mouth shut. This family is in everyone's business, and it's a bit frustrating. "It's no big deal, Daddy. Sloan showed up to the pool hall high on something. He got a little too close for comfort, and Grant came over. He put his arm around me and made sure Sloan wasn't going to start anything."

"I believe that man has earned some points with me. Sloan, on the other hand, is quickly becoming one of my least favorite people. He lays a hand on you and so help me God, I will rip him apart limb from limb." Dad pops a huge piece of pot roast into his mouth and smiles as if he didn't just threaten someone's life.

Yeah great. He may have earned points, but that doesn't mean he's going to agree to come here for dinner next week. What the hell am I supposed to say? Thank you for dinner, now you have to meet my parents because my dad is insisting you come over next weekend. I finally meet a sweet and good-looking guy, and my father's going to scare him off.

"How's Marianne? Are things going well at the dance school?" My mom asks, changing the subject.

"Thank you, Mom. Things are going well. She doesn't seem at all affected by the break-in. Like everyone else, she's concerned about me, which is sweet, but I'm fine. Now, can we please drop it?" I dig into my dinner.

"Watch your back, that's all I ask." My father's eyes are full of concern.

"I will, Daddy, I promise. It's not easy, but I'm trying to move on, and I need everyone else to do the same."

"Fair enough. Are you excited about this season?"

"We're all excited. Since it's an anniversary season, we're doing a throwback year, and doing all eighties music."

"That'll be fun," Piper adds, shocking me seeing she's not a fan of my career choice.

"That's what I thought. The girls can wear bright colors with leg warmers and stuff like that."

The rest of our meal is enjoyed with a light conversation about everyday life. Mom talks about her administrative work with one of the local lawyers. Dad tells us about a call they got for a fire that didn't exist. Those types of calls drive him crazy, but to be honest, I'm happy to know that he didn't have to fight a fire. Every time I hear about a fire on the news my heart pounds in my chest with fear for his safety.

When we're done with dinner, my sister and I make quick work of helping my parents clean up so I can head home for the night. My father wraps me in a hug. "I'll have Cory give you a call so you two can discuss the apartment. I hope you'll seriously consider letting her move in."

"I will. Thanks, Dad."

"Let me know how it goes." I nod and hug my mother goodbye.

The second I step outside, my palms become sweaty, and my heart pounds in my chest. On the verge of a panic attack, I rush to my car, slam the door shut and lock it behind me. When I glance across the street, my father is standing there watching me. I hope he didn't notice my fear.

It's late, and it's very dark when I pull up to my apartment building. I kept glancing in the rearview mirror

my entire drive home to ensure there was no one following me because I keep getting this feeling that someone is watching me.

Unable to get past my fears, I grab the phone from my purse and dial Grant's number. I think I'll feel better walking into my building alone with him on the line, besides I need to tell him about dinner with my parents in hopes he won't run.

"Hey, Jordan." He answers on the third ring. Hearing his voice gives me the confidence I need to get out of my car.

"How are you?" I ask, trying to get past my shaky voice.

"I'm great now."

I giggle. "I wouldn't be too great if I were you."

"You aren't trying to cancel our date, are you?"

I laugh. "No, I'm not, but you may want to."

"Why would I do that?" I hurry up the stairs to my apartment.

"Because my sister told my father about you, and now he expects to meet you at our family dinner next Sunday night."

He starts laughing. "I'll go under one condition."

"Oh yeah, what's that?" Once inside, I quickly lock the door behind me.

"You have dinner with me and my Gram on the following Thursday."

This guy just went to a whole new level on my like scale. I mean come on how can you resist a man that spends time with his grandmother. "Aww, do you have dinner with your grandmother every week?"

"I do. She's a very special woman," he says proudly.

I'm thankful for this distraction as I wander around my apartment, ensuring everything is still safe. Talking to Grant gives me a sense of security. "Oh yeah? Tell me about her." I kick off my shoes and lay on my bed to relax.

"She practically raised me. My mom was a junkie who left me when I was a kid, so my grandmother was my one

constant.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Grant. That must have been very difficult for you.”

“It was at times, but I’m thankful I had her to take care of me.” He pauses. “What about you? Are you close to your grandparents?”

“One of my grandmothers died when I was young. She had cancer, my grandfather passed a few years ago. My dad’s parents moved south to get away from the cold winters, so I don’t see them much, but we stay in touch.”

“Well, you can meet mine next week. She’s the only blood family I have in my life. She’s super sweet, and I just know she will adore you.”

My cheeks hurt from smiling so much, “I would love to meet her.”

“Good. I’ll mention it to her when I go over this week.”

My phone chirps in my ear. “Can you hold on one second?”

“Sure.”

When I look, I see there’s a text from my potential new roommate asking if I can give her a call.

“Sorry, I may have a new roommate and she’s texting me to give her a call. We need to work things out and see if she’s going to actually move in.”

“Oh, you’re getting a roommate?”

“Yeah, my friend Kendra lived with me for a long time but moved out to live with her boyfriend. My father has a friend whose daughter is looking for a place, and he mentioned I have a room available. I wish he would have spoken to me before he gave out all the info, but part of me doesn’t mind since I miss having someone here with me. My father didn’t promise her the place but from what my dad told me, she’s excited to get out of her parents’ house. I’m hoping we hit it off, I’m not good at saying no.”

He laughs. “That sucks, but I’ll have to remember that.”

I roll my eyes. "It is what it is. I'm sure she's totally cool. Do you have a roommate?" I secretly cross my fingers, figuring we can go there if we need privacy.

"Nah, I sort of keep to myself."

My cheeks hurt from smiling. This may work out after all. "That's cool." I pause for a second, not sure what else to say. "Well, I should give her a call. I'll see you Tuesday?"

"You will. I'll pick you up at six-thirty."

"Sounds good. Have a good night, Grant."

"You too."

He cuts the call, and I let out a deep breath. I can't believe we're already planning to meet each other's families. This is moving so fast, and despite being nervous, I can't help but be excited. I know I only just met him, but I feel like I've known him forever, and my sister is right, the connection we have is off the charts. My phone chirps again, pulling me from my thoughts. It's Grant.

Grant: Dress comfortable Tuesday. I want to do something different.

Jordan: And what do you consider comfortable?

Because to me comfortable is leggings and a t-shirt with no bra or panties.

Grant: Thanks for the visual.

Jordan: You're quite welcome.

Grant: Unless you want me to injure myself on our date, please for the love of God, wear a bra. I've seen you in dance clothes and that's enough to drive a man wild.

Jordan: LOL Will do!

I dial my potential roommate's number, and when she answers, her voice is full of excitement. "Hey, Jordan."

"Hi, Cory."

"I hope you don't mind that our fathers arranged this. I'm really excited to move out of my parents' house." She's practically squealing with excitement.

"It's all good. When do you want to move in?"

"Well, first, I think we should discuss any rules or concerns you may have?"

"Like what?" I ask her.

"I don't know. I don't have pets or anything, but it's your place. Is there anything I should know?" She is starting to sound a bit nervous.

"Nah. I'm pretty laid back. Just as long as you don't throw any crazy parties without letting me know, or leave a mess around the apartment, I'm cool. That, and be sure to pay your half of the bills on time."

"I'm actually kind of OCD with cleaning. I hope that won't bother you. I promise not to drive you crazy, but I like to keep things neat."

We may actually get along. I'm not OCD, but I definitely like a neat house. There's nothing worse than bringing a friend over, and the place is an embarrassment. "Well, in that case, you can move in as soon as you're ready. I have a date Tuesday night, though, so it either needs to be tomorrow or after that."

"Why don't we do this? If you're going to be home tomorrow, why don't I come by after work? I can see the place, and we can order some takeout and chill. Then I'll move in on Friday night, so I have Saturday to set up my room."

"Okay. I take a self-defense class on Mondays at five-thirty for thirty minutes. I'll pick us up something to eat on the way home and meet you here by six-thirty."

"Awesome. Thanks, Jordan. I'm excited."

"Me too."

I cut the call and get my stuff ready for work tomorrow. When I'm done I shoot off a quick text to my dad to let him know that we spoke.

Jordan: Spoke to Cory. She is coming over tomorrow after work to see the place and so we can meet.

Dad: Good it will make me feel better knowing you're not alone. Good night.

I chuckle having no doubt my father set this up.

Jordan: Good night, Dad. Love you.

I plug my phone in for the night, turn on my TV and kill the light. Hopefully, I can get some sleep.

CHAPTER NINE JORDAN

BETWEEN WORK and my self-defense class today, I'm totally exhausted, and I still have to go home and meet Cory. I rush out to the car looking over my shoulder as I go. Mateo wanted to walk me out, but he has some work to do so I told him not to worry about it. As I scan the parking lot, I toss my gym bag in the back seat and quickly get into the car. That's when I noticed two large photos facing down on my windshield. It's dark but I've started parking under a light to give me more security. One is of me leaving class last week, and the other is me outside my parents' house Sunday night.

Holy shit! I don't know what to do. I want to get out of my car, but I'm afraid to. What if whoever left the photos is out there watching me. I call Mateo instead of Grant. He picked up an extra shift today, and I have no idea where he is.

"What's up, Jordan?" I can hear the fear in his voice.

"I'm sorry, can you come outside?" My voice shakes.

"I'm on my way." Fear must be evident in my voice because he's at my door within seconds.

I climb out of the car and explain the pictures while I try calling Grant.

"Hey, babe." I breathe a sigh of relief when he answers. "Grant. I'm at the gym, and when I got in my car, there were two photos of me on my windshield."

"Don't touch them." He warns. "I need to call Grayson. He's a lot closer to you than I am. Are you inside?"

"No, but Mateo is with me."

"Okay, stay put. I'll call you right back." He cuts the call.

"Grant's friend Grayson is coming." Despite the warm summer air, goosebumps cover my arms, and my body begins to tremble. "Will you wait with me?"

"Jordan, you know I have your back. I'm not going anywhere until he gets here."

I nod, "Thanks," I shake my head. "I'm supposed to be meeting someone. I need to text her to let her know I'm running late."

Jordan: Cory, I'm sorry, I'm going to be late. I have an emergency. I'll explain when I get there.

Grayson pulls up and instantly jumps from the car, slipping on gloves as he does. "Grant wanted me to let you know he will call you later. He's on the other side of the city and had to respond to a traffic stop."

"Thank you." He collects the two photos, slipping them into evidence bags, while I silently pray there are prints on them so we can figure out who left them.

"I promised Grant I would make sure you got home safely. Are you ready?"

"You don't have to do that." I want to be strong. I want to be the brave Jordan I once was, but that's getting harder and harder to do.

"I do, and I will." He opens the door for me.

"I have to pick up food on the way home."

"Well, we better get going then." He won't back down from ensuring my safety, and I'm relieved knowing he will be close by.

"Thank you." I climb in and start my car because he's right. I don't like the idea of keeping Cory waiting. She told me not to stress it but still. I'm not even sure I should have

her as a roommate at this point. I would feel safer having someone living with me, but I don't want to put her in danger when someone is clearly watching me.

I called dinner in before I even left the gym so when we pull up to the restaurant it's already bagged. I quickly grab it and run back to my car so we can get to my place.

When I pull up to my apartment building, Grayson pulls up alongside me. He turns on his lights and climbs out of his car.

A girl is standing on the steps. I hurry over with Grayson following behind me. "Hi, are you, Cory?"

"Yeah, I was about to call you. I wanted to make sure you were okay."

"I'm good now. Sorry I'm late. It's been a rather intense evening." I stick my key into the lock.

"You two get inside and make sure you lock the doors," Grayson warns.

"I will. Thanks Grayson. I appreciate it." I turn to Cory. "Come on up." I secure the door, ensuring no one else can get in without a key and head up the stairs.

"What's up with the personal escort?" she asks.

"I'll explain when we get upstairs and get settled."

"Okay. What floor do you live on?" She pants behind me as we climb the stairs.

"Third. Good luck finding an affordable apartment in Boston on the first floor." I open the door to my place and invite her in. A small smile forms as she scans the room, taking it all in.

"I'm impressed. You've done an awesome job decorating this place. It's warm and welcoming," she says excitedly as I text Grant to let him know we're safe and that I'll message him later.

"Thank you. I've lived here for almost two years now, except for when I was away for boot camp. During that time, my old roommate would pop in to check on the place for me." I plop the Chinese food bag on the small table I

have set up in my eat-in kitchen. "It has two bedrooms, but only one bathroom. But the bathroom is big and has a double vanity so we each have our own space."

"Oh, that's cool. Can I see my room?"

"Sure, follow me." I take her down the short hallway to the two bedrooms, which are separated by the bathroom. I have the bigger of the two rooms, but it's not much larger. I open the door to the empty space and watch as she takes it in.

"It's a little small, but it will work." She turns to me with a smile. "Please tell me I can have it."

"Let's go talk."

She follows me back to the kitchen, where she takes a seat at the table while I grab some plates. She seems pretty cool, and it would be nice to have someone to split the rent and bills with. I put two plates and some utensils on the table and then sit. "Did you have a roommate in college?"

She nods, scooping some lo mein and ribs onto her plate. "I did."

"Did you find it challenging?"

She shrugs. "Sometimes, but we made it work. It's about compromise. We talked things out, and sometimes we agreed to disagree on certain subjects. We actually became good friends." She puts the spareribs down and says, "Listen, I understand your hesitance, but please give me a chance. I respect boundaries, and as long as you tell me if I'm pissing you off, I think we can make it work."

"Girl, that goes both ways. You have to talk to me too. This was my place first, and I'm going to be honest, if this doesn't work out, I'm going to ask you to move out because the lease is in my name, but that doesn't mean I won't listen and try to work with you. I'm not a total bitch, and I'm actually quite flexible." She nods slightly, taking in what I said. "All I ask is that you pay your half of the rent to me on time so I can make the payment. The rent doesn't include

utilities, so you'll have to pay half the electric and half the cable as well. Plus, help with the food."

"I can do that."

"Do you like to cook?" Her eyes are full of excitement.

I shrug. "Once in a while, but it's no fun to cook for one."

"True. I love to cook, so I totally don't mind making us dinner. Are you a picky eater, or do you have any allergies?"

"No and no. I'll eat almost anything, and if I haven't had it, I'll try it at least once."

She claps her hands. "This is going to be great."

I look down at my plate, trying to figure out how to bring up the taboo topic of the stalker I now seem to have. "Cory, I have to tell you something before we go any further into this arrangement."

"What's up?" Her brows furrow when she sees the concern on my face.

"I think it's only fair to tell you that a friend of mine and I caught someone trying to steal equipment from our dance studio." Her jaw drops. "We're fine, but the guy took off, and he knows my face."

"I'm so glad you're okay," she replies, shocked.

"Thanks, the reason I was late tonight is that someone has been watching me. They left photos of me on the windshield of my car. I think the guy who broke into the studio is stalking me." I wipe my mouth with my napkin and take a sip of my water to clear my throat. "I won't lie, I'm concerned. I don't want you to move in without knowing what is happening in my life."

She smiles. "Thank you for letting me know, but I think it's that much more important that I do move in. You shouldn't be here alone."

A small smile plays on my lips. "Are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

"Good. I'm excited." I'm glad my situation hasn't scared her away.

"Me too."

She helps me clean up from dinner, and then we both take a seat in our small living room and continue our conversation, discussing our likes and dislikes. We cover everything from pet peeves to favorite TV shows and even hobbies.

She, like me, hasn't dated in a while. Her ex was a total douche, and she's decided to stay away from men for now. "I'm sorry you've had shitty luck with men. I have a date tomorrow that I'm looking forward to. He's a cop and extremely hot." I fan myself.

She laughs. "I can't wait to meet him. Maybe he has a hot cop friend he can hook me up with."

"You never know!" We both start laughing.

She glances down at her watch. "Wow, it's getting late, I need to get going."

"I know. I can't believe how late it is. This was fun."

"I agree." She smiles but suddenly looks a bit shy. "Does that mean I can move in?"

I smile. "You can. I have to warn you though, I won't be here to help you this weekend. I have my first Guard duty assignment, and I can't miss it."

"I understand. Will you be home at night?" she asks, slipping her purse over her shoulder.

"Yeah, we're not in the field or anything, so I should be home between five and six. Unfortunately, it's not like a regular job where you get out at the same time all the time."

"No worries. I'll make us something for dinner to celebrate." Her smile is infectious.

"Cool." I pull two spare keys from my purse and hand them to her. "This one is for the downstairs door, and this is for our apartment."

She wraps me in a hug. "Thank you so much. I'm so excited to be out of my parents' house and on my own."

"If your father is anything like mine, I totally get it."

"You mean way overprotective? Yeah, that's my father. He lets my brother do whatever, but not his baby girl." We both laugh.

I pull the door open for her. "Well, it was nice meeting you. I'm excited for you to move in."

"Me too. If you don't mind, I'll bring some stuff by tomorrow night so that I can do a little at a time."

"Not a problem. You have a key, all I ask is that you lock up when you're done."

"Of course. Have a good night, Jordan."

"You, too." I close the door behind her and lock both locks.

Suddenly my senses are on overload. I hear every little noise my apartment makes. I need to remind myself I know what each sound is. I growl internally and storm off to my room. I hate that this guy has gotten into my head. The strong, independent Jordan has been replaced with someone who jumps at the simplest noise. I refuse to cower or freak out over little things. I shake it off and take a quick shower before turning in for the night.

Once I finally climb into bed, I shoot off a text to Grant.

Jordan: My new roommate seems cool.

Grant: Awesome. Did you have fun?

Jordan: Yeah, we ate takeout and sat around chatting.

Grant: Cool. Are you okay?

Jordan: Yeah, I feel better knowing someone will be here with me.

Grant: Me too, baby.

Jordan: I can't wait to see you tomorrow. What are we doing?

Grant: I'm not telling. You told me you weren't picky, and you'd try anything once.

I roll my eyes. I need to stop telling people that. I'm a pretty flexible person, but I'm not fond of surprises. I like knowing where I'm going and what I'm doing.

Jordan: And I will, but did I also mention that I don't like surprises?

***Grant: No, but I'll keep that in mind for the future.
See you tomorrow.***

Jordan: Grrrr. Payback is a bitch. Good night, Grant.

Grant: LOL I look forward to it. Good night, Jordan.

CHAPTER

TEN

GRANT

LYNCH and I are about to hit the road for the day when he looks at me with a snarky grin on his face. “What are you so happy about?”

“I have another date with Jordan tonight.” I boast.

A grin slowly spreads across his face.

“I’m happy for you. She’s fucking hot.” He wiggles his eyebrows at me.

“So is your wife, so how about you keep your eyes on her.”

He laughs. “My wife *is* hot,” he agrees.

I’ve discovered Lynch likes to speak his mind. The guy has zero filters, and he couldn’t give a shit who it pisses off. He’s gotten himself in trouble a few times for running his mouth. They don’t care that he’s right, it’s all in how he says it. I keep trying to tell him, but he doesn’t want to hear it, because I’m younger than him, so what do I know?

“One of these days that mouth of yours is going to get you into some serious trouble,” I warn. He’s a good cop and a great mentor, but he doesn’t respect rank the way he should. Maybe I have a better understanding because of my time in the service.

“Whatever. You say that all the time, but I’ve yet to get into trouble, and I’m climbing the ranks, so it’s all good.”

I need to change the subject. This topic can be a bit taboo for us. “Listen, I want to hit the game store on Chestnut street.”

“Shopping on shift?”

“No, remember the guy who came into the pool hall? He works there.”

He stops at a red light and glances over at me. "And?"

"He said some shit that night that didn't add up. I want to talk to him, see if we can catch him in a lie."

He nods. "Let's do it," but a voice comes over the speaker announcing that another cruiser needs back up. "Sorry, man, it'll have to wait." He calls in that we are on our way.

"How much do you wanna bet this is a drug stop?" I click the lights on as Lynch hits the gas.

Here in Boston, we deal with a lot of drugs, especially marijuana. Even though it's now legal in the State of Massachusetts, it hasn't made our job any easier. We have to ensure those who are using aren't doing it and driving. Plus, if they have it on them, we have to be sure they aren't carrying more than the legal limit.

We pull up to the call, and a K-9 unit pulls up behind us. I click my mic and report that we are on the scene. Lynch and I both climb out of the vehicle to get an update on what's happening. There are two young guys on the side of the road with their hands in cuffs and two old-timers standing beside them.

"What's going on?" I ask Stevens, whom I barely know.

He gets up in the guy's face. "We pulled this guy over for a taillight, but when he rolled down the window, we could smell the marijuana he was carrying. We're making sure he doesn't have anymore." This legalization has been a big debate amongst cops. Most of the younger cops are okay with it, but a lot of the old-timers are angry. The cops who disagree treat those who are carrying like shit even if they are carrying within the limit.

"Okay. I'll stay with them while you go conduct your search with the K-9." He nods, thanks me, and walks away. As soon as he is out of earshot, I turn to the two boys. "Is he going to find anything more?"

"Nah, man. I told him all I had on me was what was in my pocket." This is the problem with old-timers. They have

every right to search the vehicle, but it's fucked-up to treat someone shitty for carrying a legal amount of pot. It's discrimination.

"How old are you two?"

In unison, they reply, "twenty-one."

"Where were you off to?"

"We were going to his house to chill for the day. I purposely made sure I didn't take more than I'm allowed to carry. My boy ran out and asked me to bring some over. I haven't even rolled it yet. That old dude pulled us over for a taillight. He freaked out, saying I'm driving high."

"Look at me," I tell him. He looks me in the eye. It's clear he hasn't smoked yet. His eyes aren't glassy, red, or dilated.

He rolls his eyes. "Man, I just got a new job, so I ain't trying to get in no trouble." He shakes his head, frustrated.

"Where are you working?"

"Down at the docks." I'm starting to feel bad for the guy. My gut tells me we're not going to find anything, but we all stand there, letting K-9 conduct their search.

While we were talking, the dog walks around the car, sniffing. He jumps inside, sniffs all around the inside of the car, but never sits anywhere. When a dog sits, it's the sign he's found something.

When the dog is done, he jumps from the back of the car and takes a seat by his owner. He found nothing. I pull out some keys and remove their cuffs. "What are you doing? This isn't our stop." Lynch glances over his shoulder.

"They're carrying the legal limit, they were pulled over for a taillight, and their IDs came back clean. There's no need for them to be in cuffs," I inform Lynch, who looks to the two boys, then to the old-timers, and then turns back to me.

Crawford, one of the officers that was part of the initial stop, throws them their IDs and tells them to get out of there. They both climb into the car and pull away with a couple of angry cops standing around watching.

I shake my head and toss them their handcuffs.

"You need to learn your place on a scene, son," Crawford growls at me.

I take a step closer, staring directly into his eyes. "And you, Crawford, need to learn the definition of discrimination."

"Fuck you," Crawford snarls, looking me up and down like I'm some piece of shit. "This was my stop, and you overstepped."

"That's a bit of a stretch, Crawford. Should he have let you take the cuffs off? Sure, but it's not like you had something on them, so he let them go." Crawford looks at Lynch, shocked he's taking my side. "Summers is right. They did nothing wrong." Lynch steps up to defend me. "You guys were profiling because they were black and had a little marijuana."

He gives Lynch a cocky smirk. "Teach your boy some respect."

"First, don't call me son. Second, you're the one who needs to learn respect," I snarl at him. Crawford and his partner walk back to their car, and we go back to ours. "That was some serious bullshit." I slam the door to our patrol car.

"I agree, but he's also somewhat right. You should have let them decide the next steps."

"Are you serious right now?" I look at Lynch like he has ten heads.

"I am." He starts the car. "Listen, I'm not going to pretend I wouldn't have done the same thing you did. All I'm saying is you have to give people the chance to do the right thing."

He puts the car in drive and pulls away from the scene. He pulls into a Dunkin Donuts and shuts off the car. "Let them truly fuck up before you step in and say or do something. You made an assumption." I nod my agreement

because he's right. I assumed he wouldn't let them go, and in reality, he may have. He had nothing to hold them on.

Lynch grins. "I'm grabbing a coffee. I'll be right back."

"Grab me a bottle of water?"

"You got it." Lynch jogs into the coffee shop.

Man is my day starting out in the wrong direction. I need to turn this around, and I know and I know who can help.

Grant: Having a fucked up day. I hope yours is going well.

Jordan: It will be in a few hours when I get to see you.

Grant: Seeing you is the one thing getting me through this day.

Jordan: I promise to make it all better tonight.

Grant: Can't wait. Talk to you soon!

Lynch climbs back into the car, and I say, "Let's hit that store."

He agrees but spends the ride over cracking jokes and busting my balls. He knows I'm angry. He's warned me multiple times that if I don't learn to roll with the punches, I'm going to have a heart attack by thirty-five. I finally laugh and agree to let it go.

The store is small. There are only a few people inside and when we walk in two of them leave, neither of whom matches our suspect's description. "What do you want?" Sloan barks out from behind the counter.

"We have some questions for you about the break-in," Lynch tells him.

"I already told you I don't know anything." He walks away from us to put some games away.

"I think you're full of shit." He turns back to me. "What two guys would walk around a game store discussing illegal activity."

"Dumb ones," he replies.

Lynch chuckles. "This guy thinks he's funny." He points to him with his thumb.

I shake my head. "Hey Lynch, I have a question. What kind of friend doesn't call the cops when he thinks the guy involved in his friend's burglary is in his store?"

Lynch grins. "A dumb one."

"Fuck you guys." He steps closer to us, puffing out his chest. "I just got promoted. I wasn't thinking. All I was concerned about was shit disappearing and me losing my job."

I shake my head. "I'm not buying it. I see the way you look at Jordan. I don't believe for a minute you were more concerned with the product than a girl you're in love with." I point at him. "You're hiding something, and I'm not sure what it is, but I can promise you we'll be watching."

"Whatever. You'll eventually figure out you're watching the wrong guy." His eyes are glazed over. The dumb ass is high at work. He's worried about losing his job for theft but not for coming to work lit. He has his priorities straight.

"Let's go. He's not going to tell us anything." Lynch taps me on the chest with the back of my hand.

When we get back to the precinct, things seem off. People are staring and whispering. My gut tells me things are about to get ugly. The first words we hear when we walk into the locker area are, "Lynch. Summers. In my office." I sigh, making my way across the squad room floor. "Close the door." He demands snapping his gum. A habit that drives Lynch crazy.

"What's up, LT?" Lynch asks.

"What the hell is going on? The entire precinct is talking about the drug stop today." I'm standing in front of his desk at parade rest. Some habits die hard.

Lynch takes the seat beside me. "Ah, they're just angry because Summers was right. They were profiling, and when the search came up empty, he let them go."

I cut him off. "Lieutenant, the two guys were in handcuffs on the side of the road for nothing. The officers searched their car. The K-9 searched the car, and neither found so much as a dime bag of pot." I roll my eyes. "I'm not saying they didn't have the right to handcuff them originally, but when the search was done, there was nothing more to hold them on."

My lieutenant rubs his temples. "Enough!"

We both stay completely silent. Lieutenant Savage collapses into his seat. "You both need to listen and listen good. There are a lot of good cops out there who are struggling with the legality of marijuana, and I have to help them deal with it. I have half the squad pissed that you let those two kids go, and the other half is cheering you the hell on for standing up to the other cops. I don't need some war breaking out between the two sides."

"I understand, sir, but you'll have a bigger problem if someone reports some of these cops for racial profiling because they arrest kids for carrying small amounts of marijuana in a state where it's legal. They did nothing wrong. They had a taillight out. Now, I'm not saying there wasn't a right to search them. You could smell the marijuana on them, but they emptied their pockets and agreed to the search. I don't understand why we're allowing cops to treat people so poorly."

"I can tell you hang with Grayson." He chuckles and shakes his head. "You two are always seeing the good in people. You both believe that everyone deserves the benefit of the doubt."

"Why not if it's a first offense? They came back clean." I'm damn lucky I had good cops around me as a kid, or I would have never ended up where I am today.

Lieutenant Savage chuckles. What was said after the guys were released?"

"Crawford told me I needed to teach my partner his place and to have some respect." Lynch chuckles.

"After that, we left, grabbed a coffee, and finished our shift."

"Yeah, well, Crawford was just thrilled when he got back here. All he's done is talk shit about you and the stop." He shakes his head. "I hate troublemakers," he continues to mumble on while rubbing his forehead.

"Sir?"

"Never mind, just stay clear of Crawford for a while. Give him a chance to cool down and let me know if you have any problems." He cracks his neck stressed over the situation.

"I can cover my ass, sir." He silently nods.

When we got called into the office, I thought my lieutenant was going to freak out on me, but really, it's the situation in general that he's pissed at. I'm not sure what he expected us to do after we left the scene today, but we did what we should have done, carried on.

I'm climbing into my car when my phone rings. "Hey, Levi."

"Dude, are you good?"

"You already heard the rumor, huh?"

"Yup. Stevens and Crawford are pissed. He's telling cops all over the place to watch out for you. He said you took over his traffic stop and that you need to learn your place. The dude is a dick and needs to learn what profiling is. From what I hear, that's what it boiled down to."

I'm getting beyond pissed. "First, I didn't take over shit. Second, the dick *was* profiling, and when we discovered we had nothing to hold the guys on, I took their handcuffs off. That's all I did, and Lynch had my back, but they didn't seem to care."

He sighs. "I think Crawford has it out for you. He recommended someone else to be Lynch's partner, but you

got it instead.”

“Dude, you knew that all this time and didn’t warn me? What the fuck?” I growl.

“I’m sorry, but I honestly didn’t think he was going to be a dick to you. I figured he’d get over it and move on. It’s been five fucking years.” I know Levi well enough to hear in the tone of his voice that he feels bad.

“Don’t sweat it. It’ll be fine. We met with the lieutenant, and he told us to let him know if we have any problems.”

“All right, watch your back.”

“I will. I gotta run. I’m on my way to pick up Jordan.”

I pull up outside Jordan’s building to discover there’s not a parking spot to be had. The streets are lined with old, beat-up cars. It takes me a few times circling the block before I manage to grab a spot up the street where some guys are hanging out on the corner. As I climb out of my car, Jordan is walking towards me, looking as sexy as ever. She is wearing colorful leggings and a tank top with a light jacket over it. “Really? You couldn’t let me come get you?”

She laughs. “My new roommate is upstairs moving some stuff in. I came down to grab something for her and spotted you getting out of your car, so I thought I’d walk over.”

It worries me that she’s out here alone. I know she’s not in the ghetto, but still. With all that’s happening, we need to be a bit more careful.

“What’s wrong?”

I shake my head. “I don’t like the idea of you being out here alone. There’s an entire crew of men hanging up the street.”

Her smile fades. “I didn’t even think about it. I just did it.”

“I know. Please be careful.” There’s a height difference between us I hadn’t noticed until I stepped closer to her.

She tilts her head to look up at me. “I will.” A chill wracks her body, but she ignores it and smiles at me. “How are you, Officer Summers?” she says in a playful tone.

"If you don't stop with the Officer Summers shit, woman..."

She laughs harder. "I'm busting your balls. Come in. I'll introduce you to my new roommate." She opens the downstairs door, and we climb the stairs to her small two-bedroom apartment. I can't help but stare at her ass as she takes the stairs. This woman is beautiful.

I'm impressed by the way she keeps the place. It's tidy, decorated nicely, and it feels warm and welcoming. "This is a nice place."

"Thanks. Cory, come meet Grant." She hesitated for a second, unsure if it's because she wasn't sure how to title us or if she was considering calling me Officer Summers again. Either way, I'm smiling like a fool until I realize she said, Cory. She told me she had a roommate, and I thought she mentioned it was another female, but Cory can go either way, as can Jordan. I'm not sure how I would handle her having a guy for a roommate.

Christ, it's only our second date, and I'm already jealous. That is until I see a tall thin female come walking out from the bedroom. I hold my hand out. "Hey, it's nice to meet you."

Cory looks at me, then at Jordan with a grin, and then back to me. "It's nice to meet you." She looks back at Jordan with a huge grin and says, "I'll lock up when I leave. You have a good time." She winks and walks back to her room, where I assume, she's unpacking some of her things.

"Later," Jordan calls out.

I pull her close. "Was that some sort of stamp of approval?"

She laughs. "Not really, more like I was bragging that I had a date with my knight in shining armor. I told her how you came to my rescue and that you were taking me out." She glides her fingers over my pec, sending a shock through my body. "She asked if she would get to meet you, so here you are." She bites her lip, making me want to pin

her to the wall and kiss her until I bruise her luscious lips. The thought causes my dick to stir.

Our eyes are locked, I can see she wants it as badly as I do, but we have to go, or we'll be late. "Let's go. I don't want to miss our time slot."

I grab her hand and practically drag her out of the apartment. On the way, we talk about her day at the studio and how she can't wait for dance classes to start up again.

When I pull into the parking lot, she gasps. "We're going rock climbing?" her voice is full of excitement.

"We are. Is that cool?"

"Totally cool. I've always wanted to try this." Her face lights up with excitement.

"Awesome. Let's do this, and then we'll grab a bite to eat." I jump out of the car and run to her side to open the door for her.

We walk into the building, and her jaw drops in awe. "This place is so cool." I love how excited she is.

"Come on." I usher her over to the counter where we need to sign in, get shoes, and sign a waiver. The guy behind the counter is a buddy of mine. "What's up, Trevor? This is my girl, Jordan. It's her first time here."

He pulls out the waiver and asks her to sign while he gets me shoes. When she's done, he does the same for her. I tell him, "We're boulder climbing today."

Jordan looks at me, confused. "What's that?"

"You'll see." I take her hand and walk over to an area where they have small lockers for your shoes. We both quickly put on our climbing shoes, and I escort her over to the boulders. "This is boulder climbing, it's one of the easier areas to climb, it's not super high, and there's no belay, so we can climb together."

"Cool."

I give her a few basic instructions and tell her if she gets stuck to let me know. She simply smirks and takes off up the wall. I watch her for a second, checking out her tight round

ass in the leggings she's wearing. My dick stirs. This woman is sexy as fuck.

"Are you going to sit there and stare, or are you going to join me?" she calls down, pulling me from thoughts of burying my cock deep inside that beautiful ass. I need to focus and start climbing, or I'll never get up there because I won't be able to move.

I start up the wall, but by the time I'm part of the way up, she's already almost to the top of the boulder. Granted, it's not high, but she walked in here acting like she's never done this before, and she did it like a pro. She's holding on at the top of the wall when I get there. "You acted like you've never done this before."

"I haven't." She winks and starts her way back down the wall. "See you at the bottom."

My jaw drops in shock. Is there anything this woman can't do? I figured we'd start with the boulders so we could not only climb together but wouldn't have to worry about going so high, but nothing seems to bother this girl. She makes it to the bottom before I even manage to move, but she breaks my thoughts when she calls out, "Hey, you coming?"

I can't help but laugh as I start my way back down. "Wanna go again?"

"Sure, that was fun."

We move to another boulder and start our climb. Now that I know what she's capable of, I start after her, and by the third boulder she's competing to keep up with me. When we get to the top, we both take a seat laughing at our competitive nature.

"I can't believe how easy this was for you."

She shrugs. "My sister got the brains, and I got the muscle. I seem to be good at anything physical. Even our self-defense classes. My sister would get mad because I caught on easily, and she would have to practice to keep up."

My stomach growls. "Are you ready to get something to eat?" I ask her, wiping sweat from my forehead.

"Sure, where are we going to eat looking like this?" She looks down at her sweaty body.

"I got a place." I start down the wall, and she follows me.

When we get to the bottom, I grab each of us a bottle of water and a towel. We both wipe the sweat from our bodies and head out to my car. "I want to take you somewhere casual where we can chat but still enjoy some good food." I glance over at her when I stop at the red light. "I hope I didn't make a bad choice but seeing as we like to stay fit. I chose a joint that prides itself on an organic, healthy menu." She's holding back her laughter. "What's so funny?" I pull away when the light turns green.

"I'm happy to try it, but honestly, I don't eat very healthy." She laughs.

"Really? But you told me you work hard to stay in shape."

I nod. "I do, and I probably should eat better, but I dance five days a week on top of running every other morning. I work hard so I can enjoy eating what I want," she explains.

I stop at the next light and close my eyes. "I'm sorry. I guess I should have asked."

"No, it's fine. I love trying new things, and I'm totally game for this. What kind of things do they serve?"

I glance over to see she is sporting a beautiful smile. "Are you sure? We can go somewhere else. It's not like I have reservations."

"I'm positive. I think it's sweet you put thought into this. Now tell me about it." She chugs the rest of her water.

"Well, my favorite is a grilled chicken and quinoa bowl. It's loaded with grilled veggies and is delicious."

"I've never had quinoa, but as you're aware, I'll try anything once." She chuckles.

"So I've heard. Do you have any allergies?" I want to prepare a meal for her sometime soon. I enjoy cooking, but it's no fun to do it for one.

She shakes her head. "Nope. I get to eat whatever I want."

I pull into a parking spot, climb out, and run around to the passenger side to help her out of the car. "Thank you."

I look down into her big, beautiful blue eyes. "You're welcome." I stare, taking in her beauty for a moment, and finally whisper, "Shall we eat?"

She nods. "Sure." Jordan bites her lip. The electricity flowing between us is like nothing I've ever felt before. She touches me, and my stomach flips. I want to devour her here and now, but the gentleman in me won't allow it.

I step away, pulling her toward the restaurant. It's late, so it's not very busy. I love that this place is clean and inviting, with a bright green sign that says "Oh, So Good." "This place is small, but it's run by a family who believes in living a healthy lifestyle. They opened it to create a place where people could go for healthy food choices when wanting to dine out." Jordan nods, taking in the unfamiliar surroundings. There are people inside, but it's not packed, which is why I picked this location. I knew we would be able to enjoy conversation without having to yell to talk. I pull the door open and usher her in. "Come on. We have to order at the counter."

"Are you getting that chicken bowl?" she asks, her eyes glancing over the large menu up on the wall.

"Yeah. I'm sort of bad about trying too many new things. I typically find something I like and stick with it." I slip my arm around her waist.

Her eyes connect with mine. "Then how did you find this place?"

"One of the guys on the force told me about it."

She nods and looks back up at the menu board. They have a large selection of things to choose from, but she decides to be brave and try my chicken bowl. "I'll have what you're having. If we come here again, I'll try the grilled chicken and avocado salad because I love avocado."

I step up to the cashier, order our food, and pay for the meal. The woman hands us a number on a stand and our drinks. I link my fingers with Jordan's. "Come on. They'll bring the food over for us." I lead us to a quiet table in the corner of the small restaurant. A smile plays at my lips from the electricity shooting through my body. It's a slight touch but enough to send a shiver down my spine. I pull the seat out for her, and she sits as I push it in behind her. I take the seat across from her and lean forward with a smile on my face. "Tell me something about yourself."

"Not too much to tell. I've been a dancer since I was about five. I like to think that I'll dance forever, but now I'm trying to figure out how to make more of a career out of it."

"Is that hard to do?"

She nods. "I love dancing, but the pay of an assistant teacher only goes so far. The only way to make a living off of it is to own a studio or be a partner in one." She shrugs. "Marianne has made slight comments about making me a partner as she gets older, but we're not there yet. That's why I joined the Guard. I want to go to school as a business major. I figured I'd either earn a business degree so I could run my own studio or move onto something else if need be." I smile. She leans forward, mimicking my position. "Why did you become a cop?"

"My mom was a druggie." I expel a deep breath. This used to be hard to talk about, but I'm sort of over it now. "When I was younger, the cops would show up at my house, and they'd give me snacks and talk to me while they either took care of or arrested my mom." I break eye contact thinking about all I've gone through in my life. "I saw some pretty shitty stuff, but I thought it was cool that they cared about me. I vowed to be a cop one day so that I could pay it forward."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Grant, but I think it's amazing that you want to be there for other children." She squeezes my hand in silent support.

"Thanks." I manage to look back into her big blue eyes. "After a few breaks, the judge gave my mom a prison sentence, and I went to live with my grandmother. There was a rumor she got out, but she never came looking for me, and to be honest, I'm glad. I was at a very vulnerable stage in life. I was already dealing with peer pressure from other kids at school. I'm not sure I would be the same man I am today if she had."

She squeezes my hands in a gentle and caring manner. "Thank you for sharing that with me. Most people in your situation would hold back, not wanting to discuss or relive their past."

I shrug. "I try not to let it get to me anymore. It's in the past, and there's nothing I can do to change it. I try to use my experiences to help others."

A woman delivers our food, and Jordan's eyes go wide. "This bowl is huge, but it looks delicious."

We both dig in while keeping the conversation light. I discover that she likes a wide range of music—everything from hip hop to R&B to country. I'm not surprised, being that she's a dancer. I'm sure she is used to hearing a little bit of everything. "I honestly don't have a preference when it comes to music. I'll listen to anything. Now TV, on the other hand, is a different story. I grew up watching anything to do with the police and investigations. I was completely fascinated by it."

"Maybe it was your situation. I'm glad that it had such a positive impact on your life."

I'm relaxed with her, which isn't the norm for me. I'm usually quite tense on first dates, but there's something about Jordan that puts me at ease, and I'm not sure if it's the way we met or if there's something more to it.

She pushes her bowl aside, puffing out her cheeks, and exhaling a deep breath as if she's full. "Did you like it?"

"It was delicious, but I'm full," she says, confirming my suspicion.

"Good, I'm glad. What would you like to do next?" I ask.

"I don't know. What did you have in mind?" she asks with a smile.

"I'll be right back." I gather our trash and dump it in the bin placing the tray on top. I go back over to the table, take her hand, and pull her from her seat. "I'm enjoying our conversation, so how do you feel about a walk by the water?" I'm mesmerized by her crystal blue eyes.

"Sounds perfect." She bites her lip as I continue to stare. I'm hoping for a sign that she's having as much fun as I am. Her eyes beg for me to kiss her, and I want to, but this is not the place. I want to be a gentleman, so I close my eyes, reining in my control, and pull her toward the door instead.

The short drive to the water is quiet, but comfortable. We arrive as the sun is setting. I help her from the car and link my fingers with hers. As we begin our walk towards the water, I ask her about her family.

"Well, my dad is a fire chief as you know. My mom was a stay at home mom, but went back to work a few years ago. My sister is in marketing and lives around the corner from my parents in her own apartment. She went to Boston College and now works at a firm here in Boston." She kicks a rock lying in the middle of the sidewalk. "She was the smart one of the two of us. She was one of those kids that got straight A's without even trying and was offered all kinds of scholarships for both soccer and academics." She looks to the ground. "I, on the other hand, had to study a ton and work super hard for my B's."

I stop her. "There's nothing wrong with that," I whisper, lifting her chin and forcing her to look at me.

"Mom used to tell me the same thing, and she was right, but that left me without scholarship money for school." She smiles as if thinking back in time. "My parents provided us with a beautiful home and everything else we ever needed, but there wasn't much left over for things like a college education."

"I would kill to have had what you had." I hate how sad and painful my words come out.

"Grant, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean for it to sound like I was complaining. I know I have a great life, and I appreciate all my parents did for me."

I chuckle. "I know, but there are a lot of people who have no idea how good they have it."

She pulls me over to some big rocks. We lean against one and look out toward the water watching the sun sink on the horizon. It's a beautiful scene. The sky is a beautiful shade of orange. We're both quiet now, listening to the water crash up onto the shoreline. I link my fingers with hers and let out a subtle sigh. "I'm sorry." I pick up her hand, kissing her knuckles.

She steps in front of me, between my legs. "For what?"

"I'm sitting here with a beautiful woman, in front of an amazing sunset, and I ruin it by making a simple conversation heavy." My eyes search hers, and I whisper. "Forgive me."

Her fingers graze over my cheeks. "There's nothing to forgive. I want to know all about you. I'm sorry your childhood wasn't what it should have been, you deserve better than what your mom gave you, but it also made you the amazing man you are today."

I slip my fingers into the hair at the nape of her neck, graze her cheek with my thumb and stare into her eyes, slowly inching closer and closer. I rub my nose over hers and whisper, "Thank you, but let's not talk about her anymore."

"Okay." Her words are barely a whisper when she closes her eyes.

I need to feel her lips on mine like I need air to breathe. My body instantly reacts when our tongues collide. My cock stands at attention as I slide my hand up her back, pressing her warm, firm body against mine. She moans into my

mouth as my hand glides down her back, over her ass and into her back pocket. My erection pokes her in the stomach.

I break our kiss, pressing my forehead to hers. "Tell me you feel this intense connection we have," I pant.

She slowly licks her lips, and with a beautiful smile, she agrees, "I feel it."

I close my eyes and silently thank God that we are on the same page. I press my lips to hers one last time and let out a calming breath. "I should get you home. We both have to work tomorrow." She nods, but her eyes scream of disappointment. It nearly breaks me. My body is on a high, and I'm having a great time. I don't want it to end, but I take her hand and walk her back to the car with a promise to be at her parents' house for dinner.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JORDAN

GRANT IS DUE HERE SHORTLY, and I can't believe how nervous I am. I stare into the full-length mirror attached to the back of my mom's bathroom door. I'm wearing a pair of capri pants and a floral print wrap shirt that makes my eyes even brighter. I was shooting for a look that shows off my fit body without revealing too much.

I hurry downstairs to find my dad pacing the living room. "Dad, why are you so on edge? I thought you checked into him?"

"I did, and he's damn lucky I got a good report, or he wouldn't be stepping foot inside this house." I shake my head, but in all honesty, I'm glad he's protective and has the inside scoop. I've heard tons of stories from my dad about shady guys who cheat on their wives or aren't as loyal to the force as everyone thinks. I know it probably sounds crazy, but my gut tells me he's one of the good ones.

I take a seat on the couch next to my mom, who is knitting a blanket for a friend of hers. "That's coming out pretty, Mom." I run my fingers over the soft yarn. I watch her, trying to pass the time because my father is making me nervous.

"Thank you. This pattern is taking me forever," she sighs. She loves to knit, always has, but larger blankets are hard to do because they take a lot of time.

The doorbell finally rings. I jump up to answer it with my dad, hoping to prevent him from scaring Grant away.

My dad met Grant briefly at the police station, but that has done nothing to stop him from trying to show off his size. He stands about six foot two and has broad shoulders.

He puffs out his chest as he opens the door, blocking most of my view, but the second I hear his voice, I know it's him.

"Good evening, sir. I'm Grant Summers." Grant has his hand out to him, and though my father hesitates, he finally takes the offered hand and invites Grant in.

"Please, come in." My father is giving him a death stare. You know the one that makes you cringe as a child because you know you fucked up.

"Thank you, sir." Grant appears calm, but I can't help but wonder if he is truly as nervous as I am.

I step to the side, and when Grant sees me, his face lights up. "Do you know who I am?" My father's tone commands his attention. Grant looks back at my father, his expression goes from excited to serious. He takes a moment to respond, I'm not sure if he's trying to figure out if he knows him or what.

"Only because of our brief encounter at the police station, sir."

"I'm the fire chief for Station Five." He crosses his arms over his broad chest. "I want you to know I know who you are. I've looked into you and have spoken to your lieutenant."

A small smile spreads across Grant's face. For a second, I think he's going to get overconfident with my father, but he doesn't. "Did you like what you found out, sir?"

"If I didn't..." his words trail for a second. "You wouldn't be in my house."

"Understood, sir." Grant is standing with his hands behind his back at parade rest. I guess that's something you never get over.

"You and I are on good terms right now. Don't change that. This girl right here," he puts his arm around me, "means the world to me, and I have no problem killing for her." Grant swallows hard.

"Sir, I totally understand. I didn't have the best start in life, but I joined the Massachusetts Army National Guard to

become a cop so I could better my life and help kids who needed the same support I got from the Boston Police force. I can't promise you that your daughter and I will be together forever, but I can promise you I have no desire to hurt her. I think we connected the other day, and I'm asking for a chance to get to know her and see where it goes."

"Fair enough, you'll join us for dinner then. We'd like to get to know you better."

"Thank you, sir." Grant nods his appreciation.

"You're welcome. We're waiting on my daughter, Piper. Please, have a seat." My father walks over to the chair.

I link fingers with Grant and walk him over to my mom. "Grant, this is my mom, Valerie. Mom, this is Grant."

She stands from the couch. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Grant."

"Pleasure is all mine, Mrs. Smith. Thank you for inviting me into your lovely home."

The timer beeps, and my mother excuses herself to take dinner out of the oven. My father offers to help, leaving Grant and me alone in the living room. I lower my voice. "Grant, I'm sorry. My dad has always been a tad overprotective of my sister and me."

"You have nothing to apologize for. Your father has every right to be leery. The city we live in is a tough one, and you're his daughter going out with a guy you haven't known all that long. I totally expected it."

I have no idea what to say. He handled my father like a trooper, and I'm blown away at how understanding he is being. "Are you for real?" I laugh.

"This is as real as it gets." He taps himself on the chest.

"Thanks. You have no idea how much I appreciate that. In the past, my father has given a similar lecture, and when we left, I usually got a different kind of lecture from my date. Most guys get pissed that I didn't warn them or expect me to defend them to my father, but I know better."

"You can't defend me. You don't know me well enough... yet. Hopefully, you'll give me the chance to show you I'm one of the good guys." He flashes me his gorgeous megawatt smile and winks at me.

Our conversation is cut short when my sister comes running through the door. She's about to yell out as we typically do when we come into the house, but my mom comes into the room. "It's about time you got here. Dinner is ready."

I can't help but giggle. My sister loves to bust my lady balls, so it's about time she gets it back. She hears me snickering and flips me off but quickly regrets it when my father busts her. "Piper Rose Smith." She closes her eyes and lets out a slow, steady breath.

"Sorry, Dad."

He shakes his head as she walks past him to the dining room. "Are you two going to join us?"

"Yes, sir." Grant stands from the couch, and with our fingers locked together, we join the rest of my family for dinner.

As we approach the table, I realized I hadn't introduced my sister yet. "Piper, this is my boyfriend, Grant. Grant, my sister, Piper."

He reaches his hand out. "It's nice to meet you."

"Ummm, we met at the pool hall," she replies with attitude.

"My bad. I forgot." I roll my eyes and take my seat. "Excuse me for trying to be polite." I mumble.

My mom picks up a casserole dish and hands it over to me. I make my plate and pass it to Grant.

"Grant, how do you like being a cop?" my father asks him.

"I love it. Like I said before, a few cops had stepped up for me and helped me out when I was a kid, so for me, being a cop was a no brainer. I wanted to be able to do the same thing for other young kids stuck in similar situations."

"Oh yeah, and how many *damsels in distress* calls do you get a day?" My jaw drops at my sister's question, but Grant laughs it off.

"Actually, not many." He looks at me. "And I'm not sure I would call Jordan a damsel in distress, she certainly held her own." He stares into my eyes. "She's the first woman that's ever grabbed my attention. She's not only beautiful, but she's brave too."

A huge smile lights up my face. "Stop, you're making me blush."

My sister pretends to gag while my mother is glowing, and my father rolls his eyes at the drama unfolding around him. The table gets quiet as everyone digs into dinner. Grant keeps looking at me from the corner of his eye. I think he's starting to feel uncomfortable with the silence. "Daddy, did I tell you Grant is in the same unit as me?"

"You did not." He looks at Grant with a faint smile but continues to eat. I think Grant is already starting to grow on him. "You be sure to keep an eye on my baby girl while she's there."

"Oh, you can count on it, sir." Grant wipes his mouth with a napkin and places it down on his muscular leg.

My father shows him a hint of a smile. "Do you enjoy serving?" my mom asks.

"Yeah. There's structure, discipline and the sense of family between my brothers in arms and me." He pauses for a moment. "Being a young cop is a lot different from being a sergeant in the Guard."

"How so?" my mother asks him.

"I have rank in the Guard. Not much, but I'm climbing. On the force, some still look at me as a rookie. They treat us young cops like we know nothing. My years of service don't count for anything. Never mind what I've experienced growing up the son of a junkie."

"I know this is hard, Grant, but you have to bide your time. You'll get the chance to prove yourself, and when you

do, things will change," my father offers a bit of support, and it makes me smile.

"I hope so, sir." Grant wads up his napkin and tosses it onto his empty plate. "Thank you, Mrs. Smith. That was delicious."

"You're quite welcome, Grant. I hope you'll join us again soon." She gives him a warm smile.

"I'd love to."

"Mom, if you don't mind, I'm going to help you clean up, and then we'll get going. I want to get back to my place since it's Cory's first weekend at the house."

"Your sister will help me clean up, you two go." She shoos us from the kitchen.

"Are you sure, Mom?"

"Yeah, Mom. Why are you putting it all on me?" My sister may be older and smarter, but she acts like such a baby sometimes.

"It's fine, now go."

Grant and I quickly help her clear the table before we start into the living room. I throw my purse over my shoulder and open the door with Grant following behind me. "You up for coming to my place? I know that wasn't part of the plan. I want to get back, but I don't want our night to end yet."

"Sure, I'm down."

CHAPTER TWELVE

GRANT

I WAS INTERNALLY STRESSED for a few minutes when she said she had to get home to see her roommate. I thought she was going to end our night. Not that I expected to spend the entire night with her. It's Sunday, and we both have to work tomorrow, but I was hoping to spend more than two hours with her. "I'll see you at your place."

I close her car door and jog over to mine so I can follow her. When I climb into my car, I note an envelope on the passenger's side windshield. I glance around, pulling my forty-five from the holster and climb out to grab it.

I tear the envelope open, and inside is a typed letter.

Grant,

I think it's incredibly sweet that you came to Jordan's rescue. However, debts need to be paid, and promises have been made, so if you're smart, you'll walk away. I would hate to have something happen to you. You have twenty-four hours to break up with her, and yes, I'm watching.

I don't know who the fuck this guy is, but he's insane if he thinks I'm breaking up with Jordan. I tuck the letter back into the envelope and place it in the glovebox to turn in tomorrow. I don't need Jordan freaking out any more than she is now, but I know I have to tell her so she can be extra cautious.

I pull up to her apartment building, and as usual, there's no place to park. She managed to find a spot close by, but I need to circle the block. This is one of the many shitty things about living in the city. Parking is a nightmare. I find a spot way up the street, and when I finally get back to the building, Jordan is nowhere to be found. I call her cell in a panic, and she answers immediately. "Hey, I'm upstairs I'll buzz you in." She sounds livid.

The door buzzes, and I hurry up, taking the stairs two at a time, praying nothing is wrong, but when I walk through the door to Jordan's apartment, there are people everywhere. Everyone stops as we hear screaming from the other room, and one by one, people start slipping out the door.

This is not good, Cory moved in Friday, and she's already throwing parties in the apartment. I won't be surprised if Jordan tells her to get the heck out. They had a huge conversation about stuff like this. She told Jordan that she wasn't a party girl and that it wouldn't be a problem.

"I'm sorry, Grant." I'm picking up for her because I feel bad, and I know I would be pissed if I walked into my apartment to find people everywhere and had no idea what was going on. I mean let's be real Jordan is trying to get to know her and night number three she throws a party?

"Where's Cory?"

"Pulling herself together. She's embarrassed but will be out in a minute." As she's finishing her sentence, Cory comes back into the living room to help us clean up.

"I got this guys, go chill." The two of us leave her to her mess and head to Jordan's room.

"What happened?" I asked as she closed the door to her bedroom.

She exhales a deep breath trying to hold on to her control, but she's on the verge of losing it. "She invited her best friend over, and the next thing she knew, things were out of control. She was trying to get everyone to leave

before I got back, but they weren't listening." She plops down on her bed. "I told her she needs to have a conversation with her friend. She isn't the only one who lives here. Not to mention, I'm still trying to get to know her and learn to trust her."

"What did she say?"

"She agreed and apologized as she cried, making me feel terrible." I'm a softy when it comes to people crying.

"Maybe I should go so you two can work things out," he offers.

"No, please don't. I don't want to discuss it with her right now." She shakes her head.

I smile down at her. "Okay, what would you like to do then?"

"Can we chill in my room and watch some TV?"

How can I say no to that beautiful face? I kiss her on the forehead. "Of course."

We both kick off our shoes and get settled on her bed. She clicks on the TV and starts surfing through the channels. While she's looking for something to watch, I bring up dinner on Tuesday despite the fact I think she'll say no because she'll want to be here with her roommate.

"Can I make you dinner at my place Tuesday night?"

She stops channel surfing and looks over at me. She bites her luscious lips. "You want to cook for me?"

I nod. "I do."

She looks down for a brief second and then looks back at me. "I'd like that."

I lower my lips to hers. She instantly opens her mouth, our tongues collide, tangling with one another. By God, I can't get enough of her. She tastes amazing. Moaning, we both slip down onto the bed. I climb on top of her rubbing my hard cock against her pussy. She pulls away to catch her breath. I take advantage, leaving a trail of wet kisses up her jaw to her ear, kissing that sensitive spot just below it. I continue down the vein in her neck, feeling her pulse

quicken. She rolls her hips making contact with my dick. If she keeps that up, I'm going to do something I haven't done since I was a teenager.

I pepper kisses down the front of her chest to the V in her shirt, but I stop to check her reaction and make sure she's good. I know she is when she sits up, peels her shirt off, and tosses it to the floor. My mouth waters at her beautiful, perky breasts tucked into a white lace bra. I can't help but smile as I lower the lace and suck one of her hardened nipples into my mouth, causing her to let out a beautiful moan. I lick, suck, and kiss a path down her flat stomach to the top of her pants. She's about to push them down for me when I stop. "Are we going too fast?" She shakes her head. "Are you sure?"

She smiles. "Please, Grant. Give me what I need."

Slipping her pants down her legs, I toss them alongside the shirt she's already disposed of. My cock begins to swell from the sweet smell of her arousal. I pick her ass up off the bed and rip her thong from her body, inhaling deeply before throwing them over my shoulder.

"Lord, have mercy," I whisper before lowering myself between her soft thighs and licking my way through her folds. Her hips instantly buck. She has yet to learn that I'm not good at giving up control in the bedroom. I grab her hips, pinning her to the bed and devour her hard little nub. I have never tasted a woman as fine as her, and now that I have, there's no way I'm stopping.

"Grant." My name rolls off her tongue as her body convulses from the orgasm ripping through her. She looks down at me, still lying between her legs and watches as I lick away the evidence of her orgasm. She's so amazingly sweet. I don't want to waste one drop.

"That was insane," she pants, trying to control her breathing.

A huge smile spreads across my face. "Time for round two."

"Wait! What are you doing?" she asks as I begin licking and sucking on her while slipping two fingers inside of her, curling them to ensure I hit that sweet spot. Her words cut off as she rolls her hips, trying to ride the wave of pleasure that I'm about to send her on.

I know she's getting close when her pussy clenches down on my fingers. I glance up to see her biting her lip to hold back her screams. I suck her clit hard, rolling my tongue over it as I press my fingers up against that sweet spot one last time. It does the trick. She screams out my name as she finds her release. I lick, suck, and kiss my way up her leg over her hip to her breast, where I pause to play with her perky nipple.

"Grant," she calls my name, grinding her hips against my cock. "I need to feel you inside me."

"Sorry beautiful, but I don't have any condoms, so we're going to have to continue this at my house on Tuesday night." Her jaw drops, shocked.

"You seriously think we're just going to leave this where it is?" She shakes her head. "I don't think so, Officer Summers." She pushes me down onto the bed and climbs on top of me, grinding her hips, so she leaves her mark on my jeans. I laugh as she leans over to her nightstand and pulls open the drawer to dig out a condom.

"Be prepared," she sings with laughter.

"The Army's old slogan." I can't help but join her in laughter. I'm not sure how I got so fucking lucky finding this woman, but I hope she never leaves me because no woman on this earth can compete with her.

She unzips my jeans and tugs them down over my hips. I help her, removing both my jeans and my boxer briefs. "This is quite impressive." She grabs my cock, gently stroking it as she climbs back on top of me.

"You won't find it so impressive when I come in your hand, and I promise if you keep teasing me, that's what's going to happen." She laughs but stops and rolls on the

condom. "Okay, officer. Let's see what you've got." This woman cracks me up with the shit she says. I am trying to be sweet and romantic for our first night, and she's cracking jokes.

She leans forward, lining herself up, and when she does, she surprises me with a kiss. I tug her hair and bite at her neck as she seats herself on my cock. Thrusting my hips, I meet her halfway. She leans back, putting her hands on my thighs. Her beautiful perky breasts bounce as she rides me. "Shit, Jordan. I'm never going to last this way." She rides me harder, her tight pussy milking me.

She squeals when I flip her over, pull her ass in the air, and take her from behind. I slam my cock, balls deep inside her, pulling her back by her hips. I have one hand on her hip and the other strumming her clit. "Fuck, Grant. I'm..." her words cut off. "I'm coming." She calls out as her pussy tightens around me, sending me over with her. I pulse my hips deep inside of her as we both ride out the wave of ecstasy.

Holding on to the condom, I gently pull out of her. I slip it off and tie the end in a knot. She takes it and tosses it in the trash by the door to her room. When she gets close enough, I pull her down on top of me, causing her to giggle. "You never cease to amaze me." She looks at me, confused. "I purposely left condoms at home because I didn't want to rush things with you. I like you and didn't want to fuck things up by making you uncomfortable, and here you are pulling one from your drawer."

"Just because I'm a dancer doesn't make me fragile. I can hold my own Grant, and if we're moving too fast, I'll tell you."

"Did I strike a nerve?" There's some serious sass in her words. It's evident I've upset her.

"I'm sorry. People are constantly trying to protect me or watch over me because I'm a dancer. You should have heard the whining I had to put up with before I left for boot

camp. I'm a strong independent woman, and I like you a lot, so I'm going to let you know that if you want this to progress, don't think of me as a fragile flower because fragile is one thing I'm not."

I roll on top of her. "Your strength is one of the many things I like about you, and I wouldn't change that for the world."

She grins. "Really?" her attitude instantly shifts.

"Yes. You're not just physically strong, but you're strong-minded as well, and I think it's sexy as fuck."

She blushes. "I don't feel strong when you make me blush like this. Most guys from Boston don't talk like that. They're too busy trying to sound cool."

I press my lips to hers. "I only speak the truth." She kisses me one more time.

"I hate to cut this short, but it's getting late, and I have to be up early in the morning. I need to tell you something before I go, though."

"What's up?"

"There was a note on my car tonight." I run my knuckles over her cheeks. "It was a threat for me to break up with you. I'm turning it in as evidence, but I need you to be careful. Please, Jordan, watch your back." Her eyes go wide. "What is it Jordan?"

"Someone left a note on my door with a picture of me at the studio." Her brows furrow.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

She shrugs. "I didn't think about it. I was mad." She sighs. "I'm sorry, I threw it away."

I nod. "Okay, next time please let me know right away. Based on my letter this is linked to the break in."

"I'm sorry."

"Promise me you'll watch your back."

She gives me a small smile. "I will, I promise."

I nod. "I'll see you Tuesday for dinner at my place?" I confirm as I climb off of her.

"I'm looking forward to it, but there's one problem." She gets up and throws on a long t-shirt and some leggings.

"What's that?" I ask throwing my clothes back on.

"I don't have your address," she explains.

"Well, we better rectify that problem right now." I pull my phone from my back pocket and shoot her a text. "You have it now."

"What time do you want me to come over?" she asks, leading me through her apartment. We both notice that Cory is not in the living room, but she's left it spotless.

"When you get off work is fine." I want as much time with her as possible.

"Sounds good. See you then." She pulls the door open.

I place one last gentle kiss on her luscious lips. "Have a good night, beautiful." I rub my nose on hers.

She smiles. "You too, Officer Summers." She winks.

I shake my head. "What am I going to do with you?"

She wiggles her brows. "I have a few ideas."

I burst into laughter. "Good night."

She closes the door behind me, but I wait to hear the deadbolt lock before I head home with a smile so big my cheeks hurt.

CHAPTER

THIRTEEN

JORDAN

I PULL up to Grant's apartment, and suddenly I'm feeling nervous. First, I get the picture, then Grant is threatened, and now I've started getting random text messages. When I responded, no one replied back. Each text comes from a different number. I need to talk to Grant about this tonight. I'm not sure what he'll be able to do, but hopefully, we can figure something out.

I look over my shoulder as I grab my bag from the back seat and hurry up the steps. I've had an eerie feeling all day, and it's been hard to shake. The last time I had this feeling, I discovered photos on my car.

Grant's voice rings out over the intercom startling me.
“Who is it?”

“It’s me, Officer Summers.” I love calling him Officer Summers. It gets him all riled up. He presses the button to unlock the door, and I hurry up the stairs to his place. When I get to the third floor, he is standing there with his arms crossed, giving me the evil eye. I can’t help but laugh.

“Oh, you think you’re funny, do you?” He grabs my arm and pulls me into his apartment. Our bodies collide, and his lips crash down on mine. His hands are instantly in my hair, tugging to change the angle.

“Feel better now?” I ask with a hint of laughter.

He shakes his head. “What am I going to do with you?”

“I have a few ideas,” I repeated my words from the other night.

“I’m sure you do. However, dinner is almost ready, so why don’t I show you to the bathroom. You have time to take your shower.”

I came to his place straight from work, and I've been running wild with the kids all day. They go back to school soon, so things will slow down a little. The downside is, I'll switch to working in the evening, which will totally suck considering he works days, but we'll deal with it.

He takes my hand and leads me through his apartment. I'm impressed by how tidy he keeps his place. It's not only tidy, but it's cozy too. It's a typical Boston apartment. An open layout with two bedrooms, one bath, and an eat-in kitchen off the living room. His place is a little bigger than mine, but the setup is similar. He opens a closet and pulls out two towels for me and places them on the counter. "Thank you for letting me shower here."

"No problem. I'll be in the kitchen. If you need anything, shout."

"I think I got it, but thanks, big guy." I wink as he backs out of the bathroom, closing the door behind him. I thought about asking him if he wants to join me. I enjoyed his touch the other night, but I don't want to come across as easy or desperate. Instead, I hurry and wash away the day's sweat and get out so I can be with him.

I walk into the kitchen to discover Grant is standing in front of the stove dancing and singing to himself. It's so dang cute to watch. My man has some Magic Mike style moves. I slowly creep up behind him, grinding him from behind to the beat of the music. "I thought you didn't have a preference in music." He jumps, not realizing I came back into the room.

I burst into a fit of laughter. "Some cop you are, you didn't even hear me coming."

He shakes his head. "I don't have a preference in music, but if I'm having an off day, I like to jam. It helps me clear my head." He chuckles.

With my arms wrapped around his waist, I pull him to me. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, sorry, I was lost in thought." With a small smile playing at his lips, he says, "It's been crazy at work. I feel like I'm under a microscope being scrutinized by half the precinct."

"Why?" I ask, genuinely concerned. He's such a sweet guy. Why would anyone give him a hard time?

"The legalization of marijuana."

I scrunch my brows. "How does that affect you?"

"Some of the guys are upset over how I handled a stop, and they won't let it go." He shakes his head. "It's so frustrating. I became a cop to make a difference, and sometimes that means doing the right thing and following the law even though you may not believe it."

"Can you report them?" She rests her chin on my shoulder.

"I could, but if it gets out that I did that, then I'm a rat, and that could mess up my chances of getting on the SWAT team. That has been a goal of mine from day one. I don't want to do anything to jeopardize that."

"That sucks."

I shrug. "It's stupid shit they're pulling. Leaving fucked up notes on my locker or fucking with my partner." He rolls his eyes. "It's all quite childish."

"That's messed up."

I nod. "I'm so lucky to have had good cops come to my rescue when I needed them. Can you imagine if some of these old-timers showed up at my house when they arrested my mom? They don't give a rat's ass what happens to people. They have no idea how far a little caring can go." He shakes his head. "If it hadn't been for some of the good cops on the force, I never would have joined the Army National Guard, and my life would probably be shit right now. They took the time to explain that my life could be better and that I didn't need to take the same path as my mother."

"I wish I knew what to say to make you feel better. You're such a kind soul, but if everyone were as thoughtful and caring as you, we wouldn't need cops. You have to believe in yourself and continue to do what you do. It's a good fight, and I believe that you'll come out on top." I gently rub his arm.

He looks down at me with a small smile. "I promise not to be a Debbie Downer every time we get together."

I throw my head back in laughter. "It's all good. I'll just have to toughen you up." I punch him in the stomach, but I'm no match for his six-pack abs, though he pretends to be injured. He curls over coughing as he laughs at my weak punch. "Would you like me to try it for real, Mr. Funny Pants?"

He holds his hands up in a defensive manner. "Okay. I'm sorry, but you have to admit it was pretty funny how you acted like you put so much force behind it and then barely hit me."

I chuckle and shake my head. "Are you going to feed me or stand here, cracking jokes?" I plant my hands on my hips.

He rolls his eyes dramatically. "I'll feed you. I made roasted chicken with potatoes, carrots, and onions." He opens the oven door revealing a beautiful golden-brown chicken that smells like heaven. He pulls the roasting pan out, setting it down on a square potholder. "There are knives in that drawer." He points. "Can you grab me one?"

I pull the drawer open to find a large two-prong fork and a carving knife. "Here you go."

He takes them, slices into the chicken, placing both white meat and dark meat on a platter. I'm secretly praying he doesn't take all the dark meat because that's my favorite.

He opens a cabinet door and pulls down a gravy boat, pouring the gravy into it and setting it on the table he has set for two. "You even made gravy?"

"Not homemade, but yes, I made gravy."

"Where did you learn to cook like this?" It smells heavenly.

He smiles. "When I wasn't watching cop shows, I was watching cooking shows. I had to get creative, by the age of six I was caring for myself. There was never much in the house, so I had to make the best of it."

We both take a seat with the platter of food. "Help yourself." Like a true gentleman, he allows me the opportunity to go first. I take a chicken leg and some other dark meat. I notice that he puts white meat on his plate.

Once he makes his plate, I narrow my eyes playfully. "Okay, I have to know."

"Know what?" he asks with a hint of laughter.

"Do you typically eat white meat, or did you take it because I took the dark?"

He belly laughs. "You crack me up." He starts cutting into his meat. "I love white meat."

I shake my head. "We're a match made in heaven."

"I think you may be right." He winks at me and digs into his meal.

We're both quiet for a few moments while we eat, but then he breaks the silence. "How did things go with your roommate yesterday?"

"She was actually quite sweet. She felt so bad about the party that when I got home from working out with my trainer, she had fresh flowers around the apartment, and dinner was made. When we finished, I tried to help her clean up, but she told me she would take care of it. It was her way of apologizing."

"That's cool. I'm glad things have gotten better."

"Me too. By the time I had gotten out of the shower, she had already finished cleaning up. I walked up to her and told her I accepted her apology. We spent the rest of the night hanging on the couch, trying to figure out a time

when we could have a few of her friends over so I could meet them without looking like a crazy lady.”

“Did you come up with something?”

I shake my head. “Not yet, but we will.”

After sitting at the table for far longer than I realized discussing my roommate, I toss my napkin onto my plate. “That was excellent, Grant. Thanks.”

He smiles. “You’re welcome. You’ll have to fill me in on some of your favorite meals so I can continue to cook for you.”

“Ha! As I’ve mentioned before, I’m not very picky. I love almost anything home-cooked. Carbs and I are good friends.”

He laughs. “Good to know. Are you still going to have dinner with Gram and me on Thursday? She is quite excited to meet you.”

We grab our plates and begin the process of cleaning up. “Of course. Where would you like me to meet you?”

“You can meet me here when you get out of work.”

“I’ll need to use your shower again.”

“No problem.” I put the last of the dishes on the counter. He playfully flicks water at me as he’s loading the dishes into the dishwasher.

“I think you like knowing I’m naked in your shower.” I tease.

He pulls me close and stares into my eyes. “Visions of this beautiful body play over and over in my mind since I experienced it the other night.” His words go straight to my core, soaking my panties. He leans in, kissing me hard but then pulls away. “Shall we relax with some TV for a bit?” An evil grin plays at his lips. The bastard knows exactly what he’s doing. He’s making me want him that much more, but payback’s a bitch. Two can play this game.

“I’d love to.” I try hard to sound unfazed by what he’s doing, but I’m not sure I succeed.

He closes the door to the dishwasher, links his fingers with mine, and takes me to the living room. We're both settled on the couch to a rerun of *NCIS LA* with his arm around me, and me snuggled into his side.

We're into the show talking about what we think will happen next when my phone rings. "Oh, excuse me." I grab it and see it's my girl Peaches, from boot camp.

"What is up, girl?" Peaches' voice rings out as soon as I answer.

"It is so good to hear your voice. What's going on?"

"You're never going to believe this."

I mouth to Grant that I'm sorry and to give me a minute. He nods and smiles.

"What?" I ask her.

"There is a chance that my company will transfer me, and do you know where they're going to transfer me to?"

"Where?" I ask with a huge smile, praying I'm right.

"Boston, bitch!" she screams into the phone.

"Holy shit! That would be awesome!" We're both squealing far too loud.

"I'll find out in the next couple of weeks, so I'll reach out and let you know."

"Awesome! I'll talk to you soon."

"Later, boo."

"Later." I cut the call.

"What in God's creation was that all about?" Grant asks me.

"That was Peaches. We became super tight in boot camp. We talked about everything and did everything we could together. We were both super sad when we had to part ways but promised to stay in touch. I emailed her my address at AIT as soon as I could. We mailed letters to each other all the time. She may be moving to Boston."

"That's pretty cool. I made some friends in boot camp, but we didn't stay in touch. But my boys from the academy, we're tight, and we still get to see each other quite often."

At this point, I'm super excited that I may get to see my friend, but I'm disappointed that the show is almost over, and that means I need to head out soon.

It's time to fight fire with fire. My hand has been resting on his thigh throughout the entire show, but I've started slowly drawing small circles with my fingers over the last few minutes. I gradually crawl up toward his cock, but I never take my eyes off the TV. I'm just below his impressive package when he clears his throat. I'm trying so hard not to laugh because I know his cock is starting to swell. Instead of running my hands over his now fully erect cock, I glide them over his hip, up his abs to his chest. My eyes rake over his body until they connect with his. They reveal nothing but want and desire. He lowers to press a kiss to my lips, but before he connects, I jump up off the couch. "It's getting late. I should get going."

His eyes are about to pop out of his head. "Are you serious right now?"

"Very. You're a police officer. You need your sleep so you can be alert tomorrow. I wouldn't want you getting hurt on the job." I take his hand and attempt to pull him up from the couch, but he pulls me back down and flips me, so he's on top of me. He has an intense look in his eye, and just when I think he's about to lose control, his mouth crashes down on mine for the briefest second. He lets out a slow breath as he grinds cock against my throbbing sex.

He climbs off of me and pulls me from the couch. "Where are you parked?" he asks, leaving me equally shocked.

"Right out front." He opens the door. "Come on. I'll walk you down." This chemistry is going to kill us if we keep playing this game. He watches as I climb into my car. I need to get home to relieve this pressure, but as I'm about to pull away, he sends me a text message, so I stop to check it.

Grant: Don't you even think about using a vibrator when you get home. I'm going to have blue balls for days.

Jordan: Maybe you should take care of that while you picture me taking care of myself ;-)

Grant: Don't make me come over there. Your pleasures are all mine.

Jordan: Don't threaten me with a good time. Good night, Grant.

As I pull up to my apartment, my phone buzzes once more. I'm excited to see what Grant has replied with, so I quickly unplug my phone only to see it isn't him.

Have fun with your boyfriend tonight?

Crap. I was so wrapped up in Grant that I forgot to tell him about the texts.

Fuck you! Just leave me alone.

Oh, I plan on fucking you. In due time, beautiful.

My eyes go wide. I take a screenshot and send it over to Grant with a message that I forgot to tell him about the texts I've been getting.

My phone rings a second later. "Where are you, baby?"
"In my car, outside my apartment."

"Hurry inside."

I scan the streets to see if I see anyone or anything I should be worried about. "Baby?"

"Sorry, I was checking the area out before I got out of the car." I climb out and run across the street. As I approach my door, Sloan jumps out from a shadow scaring the shit out of me. I scream.

"Jordan!" Grant yells into the phone that I just dropped.

"Sloan, you asshole." I bend over to pick up the phone. "Sorry, Grant. Sloan is here, and he scared me."

"Do you need me to come over?"

"No, just hold on one second." I turn back to Sloan and expel a deep breath trying to slow my racing heart. "What's up?"

"I just wanted to check on you. Are you okay?"

I sigh. "I'm fine, Sloan."

He nods. "I take it, that's your new boyfriend?" He points to the phone.

"It is."

"Let him know I reported the two guys who were in my store. They came back, but they left before the cops got there."

"Jordan, I heard him. I'll look into it," Grant says into the phone.

"Thanks, Sloan. It's late. I'm going to head up."

He nods, looking disappointed. "Have a good night."

I jog up the steps to my building and let myself in securing the door behind me. "Do you believe him?" I ask Grant.

"I don't know, baby. You try to get some sleep. I'll look into his claim and the texts coming into your phone."

"Thanks, Grant. Good night."

"Good night, beautiful."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

GRANT

WHEN I PULL up to my building, I'm surprised to see Jordan sitting on the front stoop waiting for me. My balls instantly throb in anticipation. I've had nothing but sexy dreams of her working my cock thanks to her little tease fest the other day.

As I'm climbing out of my car my phone pings. I grab it off the charger, noting I have a text as I cross the street. I glance down to read it.

I have been quite patient! Your time is up.

I flinch but quickly recover. I don't want Jordan to know this guy is continuing to threaten me. This bastard knows my car and my cell number.

"Hey, beautiful." I try to act like my dick isn't already hard.

She jumps up and asks, "How was your day?"

"It was good, and it just got even better." I lean down and press my lips to hers. I unlock the downstairs door, but we both jump when we hear tires squealing behind us. A car races down the street, typical in Boston, but to be safe, I usher her inside. "Do me a favor. Until we find the guy stalking you, please lock yourself in the car until I can get you a key to my place."

She nods. "Sure."

"How was your day?" I ask, changing the subject.

"It was productive. We got a lot accomplished at work, which is nice, seeing as we leave for Fort Drum in a couple of weeks."

"Yeah, good ole, Fort Drum. I'm looking forward to spending two weeks shooting and running drills." The best part of annual training is it's two weeks of not having to stress over this stalker getting to her.

"It should be interesting. I'm riding shotgun with Staff Sergeant Cummings."

"Did she give you any shit about me being a Staff Sergeant?"

"Nah, she's cool. She reminded me it's against regs but if we keep it on the down low she won't say anything. She's super sweet." I roll my eyes. "Unless you piss her off. She'll open a can of whoop-ass like you wouldn't believe."

I laugh. "If she's anything like you, I believe it. I don't know her all that well. We only deal with supply if we need to replace equipment or to draw our weapons and ammo for the range." She drops her bag by the door when we get upstairs.

"Do you want to shower first?" she asks me.

"How about we shower together?" I ask gently, gliding my fingers down her jawline to her chin, angling it slightly.

"Will I still get to meet your grandmother if we shower together?" she asks, wrapping her hands around my waist.

"Ha! My grandmother will kick my ass if I don't show up. She is excited to meet you." She wouldn't really, but I love that she cares.

"Okay, then we'd better hurry up and get in the shower."

I internally fist pump. I need to get her naked. I've had the worst case of blue balls since she left the other night, and it's making me miserable. We hurry into the bathroom, and I start the shower. She jumps in while I grab some towels. When I join her, she's rubbing soap all over her sexy body.

I strip from my clothes in record time, climbing in with her. Her nipples are hard, like little erasers. I quickly rid her of the soap and lower my lips to her perky breast, massaging one while I suck on the other. "Mmmm," she moans quietly. "Grant, we'll be late."

"Already told Gram we would be there later than usual." I run my free hand down the front of her body, parting her folds to discover she's already extremely aroused. I slip two fingers deep inside her, curling them, hitting that special spot. In no time at all, she's squirming and on the brink of a major orgasm, but I stop before she reaches the point of explosion. Her jaw drops when she realizes what I'm doing. This game we're playing is getting dangerous, and I know I'm screwed when she drops to her knees before me, hot water running down her long blond hair.

She wraps her fingers around my thick, hard cock and slowly strokes it. "Are you sure this is the game you want to play?" She licks from the base of my cock to the tip ensuring she gets the pre-cum that's beaded there waiting for her. When I don't respond, she wraps her lips around the tip, sucking it hard. My hips instantly jerk, forcing my cock to the back of her throat. She takes me like a champ. She squeezes my ass as she sucks me at a slow, steady pace. I'm about to blow my load in her mouth when she jumps up from her knees.

Slamming her against the shower wall, I wrap her hair around my hand and growl into her ear. "You win." I suck and lick the vein in her neck as I rub the tip of my cock against her sensitive clit.

"Take me, Grant." She thrusts her hips forward for friction.

"Bend over and grab your ankles." I line up with her opening and slip myself deep inside of her. Grasping her hips, I thrust my cock deep inside of her at a punishing pace. It doesn't take much to make her cry out as waves of ecstasy take over her body. Her pussy clenching my cock

sends me over the edge. I seat myself deep inside of her and release all I have.

She stands back up and giggles. "Guess I have to wash up again." Her brows furrow when she reads the panic on my face. "Grant, what's wrong?"

"We didn't use a condom." I'm struggling to look her in the eye. "Jordan, I'm sorry. I never lose control like that." I feel horrible. I silently pray that she's on the pill. I don't have to worry about being clean. Considering the junkies that I deal with, I never want to question it, so I get tested every six months.

"Well, I guess it's a good thing I'm clean, and I'm on the pill."

I exhale a calming breath. "Thank God. I'm not anywhere near ready to be a daddy."

She grabs her body wash and quickly starts to clean up, and I do the same. She suddenly stops and turns to me, her eyes slightly narrowed. "Do you ever want to have kids?" She pauses for a moment. "As you said, we're nowhere near that point, but I love kids and definitely want some of my own one day." I feel horrible because the hurt is evident in her voice.

I look to the floor and then back to her. "I like kids, and yeah, I'm pretty sure down the line I'd like to have one or two, but the timing isn't right. We need to experience each other more, get to know each other." She nods and visibly relaxes. "Did I freak you out?" I ask, hoping that I didn't scare her away.

"I wouldn't say you freaked me out, but I have to admit it would be hard to figure out what to do if you told me you were dead set against it." She shrugs. "Think about it from my point of view. I wouldn't want to spend time growing close to someone and building a relationship with that person if he doesn't want the same things I do."

My childhood was rough. The thought of bringing a child into this world is scary. My mother wasn't always a druggie,

but people change. I want to believe that Jordan would be an amazing mother but who knows, and it's that fear of the unknown that makes it tough. "I hear you, but I think ideas on what life is and where it will take you changes when you admit to yourself you truly love someone."

"I would agree with that. I think it's hard to see possibilities when you have yet to find the right person to share your life with." She presses up on her toes, giving me a chaste kiss.

She starts to pull away, but I bring her back. "Are we good?" I ask her, staring into her eyes. I'm feeling a little self-conscious after that conversation.

She smiles. "We're great."

"Good, because we need to get going so Gram doesn't worry."

I hand her a towel, and she quickly dries off, climbing out behind me.

We pull up to Gram's house about thirty minutes late, which actually puts us an hour late. I feel bad, but at least I called her on the way to let her know. She doesn't care because she sits up half the night watching TV anyway. It's going to be tougher for Jordan and me, seeing as we both have to be up early in the morning.

When we walk through the door of her building, I lead Jordan straight to the elevator. As usual, when I knock on the door, she shouts, "Get in here Grant," with frustration in her voice.

I use my key to open the door. "Hey, Gram."

"Hello, dear. When will you learn to just come in?"

"Never, it's your apartment. You deserve privacy." I leaned down to plant a kiss on her cheek, but she shooes me away. "Who is this angel?"

Jordan instantly blushes. "Gram, this is my girlfriend, Jordan."

"She's stunning."

"Thank you, ma'am. It's nice to meet you." She shakes her hand gently.

"Please call me Gram." My grandmother gushes over Jordan as I knew she would.

"I'll grab some plates." I head to the kitchen while Jordan takes a seat next to my grandmother. She is over the moon excited to meet her. Her face lit up like a Christmas tree when we walked in, making me feel even worse about making her wait. I walk back into the room with plates for Jordan and my grandmother. "How was your day, Gram?"

"Oh, it was wonderful. I met a nice gentleman named Mr. Frazier, from down the hall. He's new here. He came to see if he could borrow some cream, and we got to talking. I made him coffee, and we chatted all morning. He has a grandson around your age. The poor young man is in between jobs right now, but it works out because he stops in to spend time with his grandfather."

I hand Jordan a bottle of water and take a seat next to her with my plate. "Gram, please be careful who you let in the house."

She waves me off. "You worry too much. He's as old as I am. I'm sure he's not some serial killer."

"You never know. Please be careful."

She rolls her eyes and ignores me, digging into her food. She speaks animatedly with Jordan, getting to know her and telling her about Mr. Frazier. They're now apparently going to have a coffee date each morning. He'll bring the coffee, and she'll supply the sugar and cream.

"I tried to convince him to join us for dinner tonight, but he told me he couldn't because his grandson was bringing him dinner. He promises to meet you another night though."

"Good, I'd feel better knowing who is coming to visit with you."

"Grant, you need to take a break from being a cop," Jordan encourages.

"She's right, Grant. You're going to give yourself a heart attack at a very young age if you continue to worry like this."

I know they're both right, but it's not all that easy. "Easier said than done."

Gram shakes her head and changes the subject, telling Jordan some stories from my childhood. There were gaps in time because I went back and forth between Gram and my mom. Some of the times I lived with my mom, Gram stayed away because my mom was physically abusive toward her.

"When Grant was little, he was the most adorable kid. He reminded me of Linus from the comic strip Peanuts. He would wander around with a blanket, his thumb in his mouth." For a while, Gram helped my mom raise me, but that didn't last too long.

Jordan bursts into laughter.

"Really, Gram? That's the first story you need to tell her?"

She shrugs. "Your mother pushed me away not too long after you started school. She wanted me to give her money, and I wouldn't. I would bring you food, clothes, soap, but I refused to feed my daughter's addiction, and that made her mad." It killed my grandmother to stay away, but she knew she had to when my mom took a swing at her while high on coke. "I snuck food and necessities to the apartment. I know your mom thought it was her boyfriend delivering the stuff, and I honestly didn't care. As long as you got what you needed."

"When I was in my first year of middle school, my mom was arrested. She somehow managed to make bail then disappeared. Gram took me in to finish raising me. Eventually, they caught her, and she went back to jail. We got word that she had been released, but she never came looking for me." It was important to me that my grandmother understood that I never blamed her. I

understand why she did what she did. She could have been hurt, or worse, end up dead.

"What about your dad?" Jordan asks.

"I never knew him." I explain. "My father took off while my mom was pregnant."

Gram adds, "I didn't know much about your father, but I did know he was the one who got your mother hooked on drugs. I was hoping after he ran off that she would clean herself up, but after she had you it got worse."

"Wow, I'm sorry you both went through that. It must have been so hard to walk away from your daughter and grandson." She looks at me.

"It was, but we both survived." Gram smiles warmly.

"You're a strong woman." Jordan smiles at her.

"You are such a dear," my grandmother tells Jordan. "I can't believe you're in the Army like my Grant." She changes the subject. "I'm so proud of you. It takes a brave, strong woman to join, and an even braver woman to stand up to a criminal like you did at your school."

"Thank you, Gram. I'm lucky. It was a dangerous situation, but it brought Grant back into my life."

She winks at Jordan and pats her on the leg. "Everything happens for a reason."

"I agree." Jordan smiles happily.

"Gram, I know we haven't been here long, but we have to get going soon. I have to take Jordan back to my place so she can get her car. We both have to work tomorrow."

"That's fine, dear. I'm glad you brought this gem by." She turns to Jordan. "You make sure you come again now, you hear."

"I will, Gram." She leans down and kisses her on the cheek. "Who are you kidding? He can't keep me away now," Jordan jokes with Gram giving her a big hug.

"I'm glad to hear it. You two drive carefully now."

"We will." I give her a quick kiss on the cheek.

“Night, Gram.” We say in unison. The sound of Jordan calling her Gram makes me smile.

CHAPTER

FIFTEEN

JORDAN

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL AUGUST DAY, the weather has been amazing, but the summer is coming to an end all too quickly. "I can't believe it's already the final week of camp," Marianne says while I sit behind the desk, preparing for fall registration. Normally, I wouldn't worry about it until after camp is over, but my annual training for the Army is coming up, so I have to start early.

"I know. I'm almost done with the new brochures." I took over designing the brochures and enrollment forms for Marianne about two years ago. I need to get them off to the printer, so they get back in time.

"What about the marketing ads?" she asks. I also set up all the advertising with the local news station, in all the local papers, and on Facebook to reach parents in our area with kids at different age levels. Marianne passed it all off to me, acknowledging times have changed and that she needed a younger voice in her marketing in order to get new parents into the school.

"I've scheduled them all already. I've placed ads with the two local newspapers, an ad through our Facebook page, and a few mom's groups are sharing flyers in their Facebook groups for us." Most instructors only want to teach and choreograph. Still, there's so much more to running a business, and I understand that, which is why I decided to use my military school benefits to enroll in online Business Management courses at the University of New Hampshire.

"Awesome. Take a break from that. I want to see your solo before the girls get here."

"It's not done yet." I remind her.

"That's okay. I know you've been working on it."

We step onto the dance floor, and I take my opening pose while she starts the music. I show her how much I have done. "That's all I have for now."

"That looks great, Jordan. I can feel the emotion behind every move you make. Keep working on it." She's glowing with excitement.

The door opens, and a delivery man walks in. "Looks like hubby sent you flowers." I tease.

The gentleman says, "Jordan Smith."

Marianne laughs. "Looks like your boyfriend sent you flowers," she teases.

I squeal and run over to sign for them. I pluck the card from the beautiful bouquet of long stem roses.

Jordan,

You look stunning on the dance floor. I can't wait for you to dance for me.

xoxo

Your admirer

My smile fades as fear takes over. They're not from Grant, and I was right, someone is watching me. I snap a picture and send them off to Grant, explaining that I got flowers from my stalker.

He comes through the front door with Lynch a few minutes later. "Are you okay?"

I nod. "That was quick."

"We just happen to be patrolling up the street," he explains.

"I thought they were from you." My hands are shaking. This guy is getting on my last nerve.

"I'm sorry they weren't, baby." He slips on gloves and grabs the card sticking it into a bag. "I'm going to head over to the florist to find out if they were ordered over the phone or in person."

"Maybe they paid with a credit card, and we'll get a lead from this," he explains, trying to calm me down.

"What freaks me out is the message." Grant looks down to read it. "Three-quarters of the window is screened so you can't see in. He would have to be standing on something to look over the top of the logo."

"Or, he is watching you some other way," Lynch adds.

My brows furrow. "What do you mean?"

"He could have a camera hidden somewhere. We didn't look for that when the place was broken into. We only looked for prints and what was missing."

He's right. We never even considered the possibility of a hidden camera. We thought this was a random break-in by some druggy that needed the money.

I rub my hands over my face. "This is getting out of control. Why me? And what does this have to do with the break-in?"

"I don't know, but I promise you we'll figure this out, baby." He picks up the vase of flowers.

"Thanks." I give him a weak smile.

"Let's hit that florist." Lynch taps him on the chest.

He looks deep into my eyes and says, "You be careful, and please text me when you get home."

"I will." He kisses me gently, and they leave to do some digging.



"Good night, Marianne!" I call out, tossing my purse over my shoulder.

"Good night. Drive safe." I chuckle at her comment. She repeats the same thing to us every evening as we leave, but I love that she is like a second mother to me.

I pull the door open and step outside, looking back over my shoulder. When I turn, I walk right into a tall man with dark hair, dark eyes, and a perfect smile. He's wearing an expensive well-fitted suit. He grabs my arms to prevent me from falling. "Excuse me. I'm so sorry. I wasn't watching where I was going."

He looks down at me in amusement. "No worries, but you should be careful. You could get hurt." His heavy Italian accent makes me smile.

"What's so funny?" he asks.

"Nothing, I love your accent." I have always had a thing for accents. I don't know what it is. I just love them. "Thank you for not letting me fall." I continue making note that he's still holding me.

He ushers me off to the side out of the way of other pedestrians. "Are you okay? You're shaking." Of course, he's picked up on my jitters. If this man only knew what I've been going through, he would totally understand. His eyes are etched with concern.

"I'm fine. I just scared myself when I walked into you."

"Well, if you are sure, I will be on my way." He stares into my eyes, making me a tad uncomfortable.

"I'm sure. Thank you again for catching me." I step out of his grasp.

"You are very welcome. You have a good night." He continues walking up the sidewalk and I climb in my car to head home but my phone pings.

I can see Grant still hasn't adhered to my warning.

What are you talking about?

Ask him

Leave us alone

Sorry, can't do that.

I click the lock on my doors and glance around to see if anyone is watching me. I'm over this situation already. I want my life to go back to normal.

Nothing seems out of place, so I shake out my jittery hands and start the car. It's been a long day, I want to go home and get something to eat. I toss my phone in my bag and head for my place. I'll call Grant later and ask him what is going on.

I unlock the door to the building and shoot Grant the text I promised him on the way up to my apartment. The moment I open the door, the aroma of garlic fills the air. I take in a deep breath closing my eyes and enjoying the smell of a home-cooked meal. "Girl, it smells good in here." I walk across the living room to my little kitchen, where Cory is hard at work.

"Thank you. Tonight, for dinner, we have a salad with some stuffed shells and garlic bread," she says in the tone of a professional hostess.

"How much time before dinner?"

"About fifteen minutes," she replies with a smile.

"Awesome. I'll be right back." I rush off to take a quick five-minute shower and throw on some comfortable clothes.

When I make my way back to the kitchen, I find Cory cleaning up after herself. It's nice to see that she's a tidy cook too. I love Kendra, she's my girl, but whenever she would cook it would require every pan in the house and she would leave a huge mess. Now don't get me wrong, I don't

mind helping clean up from dinner, especially when someone cooks for me, but when I say Kendra was a mess, I mean it. There would have been sauce all over the stove, the counters, and the backsplash. The pans would be stacked in the sink, and she'd be uttering excuses why she needed so many pans. Then when she was done eating, she would walk away and tell me she cooked, so I get to clean.

"That was quick," Cory says, paying attention to the stove.

"It's one of the habits I picked up in boot camp." I pull open the refrigerator door. "Want some wine?"

"Would love some."

I pull two glasses from the cabinet and open the bottle of pink Moscato I have in the fridge. "Here you go." I hand her a glass.

"Thanks." She clinks her glass with mine and says, "To new friendships," before taking a large gulp.

"To new friendships." When she opens the oven door, the smell of sauce, cheese, and garlic fills the room. "How did you have time to do all this?"

"I've learned a few shortcuts from my mom." She pulls the pan out. "She was crazy busy running my brother and me around, so she needed to make things quickly. I loved helping her cook, so I picked up some of her tricks."

"Awesome. It smells heavenly." I inhale a deep breath of garlic and cheese. "I love food far too much! Thank God, I love working out too."

She laughs. "Well, let's see if it tastes as good as it smells." She puts a few large shells on my plate and a few on hers. She already has a table set up with two small bowls of salad and garlic bread.

I love pasta. It's one of my favorite dishes. I cut the shell in half and scoop it up, blowing on it briefly before popping it into my mouth. It's hot, but it's so fucking good, I don't care. "Dude, this is amazing." I take a sip of wine to cool my mouth down.

"Thanks." She gets quiet for a brief second and then looks at me with uncertainty.

"What?"

"What would you say to us having a little girls' night? You know, we invite your friends to meet my friends, kind of thing."

"I think it's a brilliant idea." I keep shoving the delicious food into my mouth. "Mmm...I know we mentioned it, but we should actually plan it."

"Really?"

I nod dramatically. "I do." I wipe my mouth and continue. "First, I don't want your friends to think I'm a total douche canoe because I'm not. You just threw me off guard the night of the party. And second, I'd love to meet them under better circumstances."

She bursts with laughter. "They do not think you're a douche canoe, and my bestie feels bad she took over your place. She'd love to come over to meet you and hang out. She feels she owes you an apology."

"Well, this is my last weekend home for two weeks. Why don't we make plans for Saturday? I don't have any plans with Grant yet, but we'll be at annual training for two weeks together anyway."

"Sounds good."

"Awesome. I'll shoot him a text when we're done with dinner."

We both work together to clean up, and when we're done, we fill our wine glasses and head to the living room to hang out for a bit. It's nice hanging out with my new roommate, catching up on daily life and getting to know her. Despite our rocky start, she's extremely sweet. She loves to read romance novels on her Kindle, go out dancing, and is an extremely good cook. That's how she ended up with a crap ton of people in our apartment. She invited her bestie over for dinner, and when she showed up, she had an

entire posse of people with her. She didn't know what to do and didn't want to be rude, so she invited them all in.

Her phone pings, and she jumps up to grab it. She taps out a message replying with a sigh. When she's done, she collapses on the couch again and says, "I need to learn to say no to people. I'm way too nice."

"I think I've already learned that about you." I wink at her, so she knows I'm teasing. "What's up?"

"My boss sent me a text telling me she needs me to work late tomorrow to help her plan for a conference she has coming up. They run this thing every year. It was the first thing I was told about when I got this job, and I've been trying to help this woman plan for months now, but she kept telling me we have time. Now that the conference is right around the corner, I have to work overtime to help her ass out."

I chuckled. "Now that there is a true douche canoe." I shake my head. "Did you ask her where she was last month when you tried to help her out?"

"God, I so fucking want to, but she can be such a bitch, and with my luck, she'll fire my ass."

I roll my eyes. "I hate people like that. My supply sergeant has a sign up in her office that says, 'Poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part.' In other words, bitch, you should have taken my help last month when I offered it!"

She bursts into laughter. "I wish she had, but like I said I have to tread lightly for now. I heard a rumor that the last girl that worked with her quit because she was placed in a similar situation. She tried to get my boss to start planning stuff ahead of time, and when she wouldn't, she went ahead and took the lead, not wanting to run around crazy at the last minute. My boss totally freaked out. So this girl found another job and told my boss to go fuck herself."

My eyes go wide. "That's crazy."

"Right."

"The girl was my age, maybe a little older. I hope she had something else lined up because I could never imagine saying that to someone and not having another job. That's a bridge burned for sure."

"Oh, it's burnt to a crisp. That said, it's pretty shitty that there are bosses out there that will take advantage of young people like us who are trying to build careers."

"It's true. I always have my eye on something better. I took business administration classes when I went to school because I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. Working with this woman makes me want to get into Human Resources, so I can write people like this bi-atc up for treating employees so shitty."

"So, take some human resource classes online. That's how I'm getting my degree. I start in September. I'll do my classes during the day and teach dance in the evening."

"I'll think about it. I do small tasks for Human Resources now, so it's probably not a bad idea."

A yawn escapes me, and I realize it's getting late. It's been nice chatting with Cory and hanging out. We both have to be up in the morning to hit the gym before work. "Listen, I'm going to call it a night. Thanks again for dinner."

"You're welcome. I'm going to finish my wine, and then I'll shut off all the lights and head to bed myself. See you in the morning," she says, grabbing her kindle.

I don't know how she does it. She goes to bed so much later than me and wakes up far more chipper, but hey if it works for her, who am I to judge?

As soon as I'm changed and in bed, I grab my phone and call Grant. "Hey, baby," he answers on the second ring.

"Do you have a few minutes?"

"Sure you sound upset, is everything okay?"

"I'm not sure, but before I get into that, I want to let you know that the girls are coming over this weekend, so I won't be able to see you."

"Okay." I can hear that he is leery as to what is coming next.

I adjust my pillow to lean against the back of my bed and let out a sigh. "Grant, have you been getting more threats?" The phone goes silent as he contemplates his words. "Don't lie to me, Grant. I won't tolerate it."

He sighs. "I've gotten a few texts since the letter reminding me of the threat about breaking up with you."

I close my eyes and contemplate how to handle the situation. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Jordan, you're dealing with so much right now. I didn't want to add to it. Besides, I carry everywhere I go. What is this guy going to do to me?" he explains, sounding quite confident that he can take care of himself.

"That's not the point. This situation is serious. Your life is in danger, and you kept it from me." I'm hurt and scared. A combination I'm not happy with.

"I'm sorry, Jordan. I can hear your hurt. I promise I won't keep anything else from you. I don't want you to worry about me."

"I hate to tell you this, but I do. You're just going to have to get over it." I expel a deep breath, trying to gain control of my emotions.

"Aww, you care about me." He changes his tone to lighten the mood.

I can't help but smile. "I do."

"Good, I care about you too. Now get some sleep, and I'll talk to you tomorrow. Okay?"

"Okay. Good night, Grant."

"Good night, baby."

Next, I send a text message off to my girls, inviting them over for our little girls' night on Saturday. After I get an instant round of replies telling me everyone is in, I can turn in, but as I'm putting my phone down, I get one more text and decide I should answer it, but when I look, I have a text from another unknown number.

You looked beautiful today. I look forward to seeing you again soon.

CHAPTER

SIXTEEN

JORDAN

IT'S FAMILY DINNER NIGHT, and I have to admit I'm a bit tired after our wild and crazy girls night last night, but seeing I'm about to leave for annual training next weekend, I can't skip out on my parents.

We've decided to ride to their house together today. Grant is coming over to hang out for a little bit before we have to leave. I have the place to myself since Cory went to run errands. Her timing is perfect. All our sex talk last night had me a hot mess. I had the most amazing dream about Grant, his talented hands running down my body, and his lips working their magic. I woke just before the point of explosion.

I bite my lip, fantasizing while I'm supposed to be cleaning, but I can't help myself. This man does things to me. My dreams have bordered on an orgasmic explosion almost every night since we met. It's crazy, but I don't care. Our chemistry is off the charts, and that's not something you find every day. I stick the duster back in the closet and grab the broom to sweep the floor.

As I'm finishing up the buzzer rings, it's a tad early for Grant, but I can't help but be excited. "Hello?" I respond in a sexy voice.

"Hello," a creepy, raspy voice rings back through the intercom.

"Grant, you're not funny." If he is fucking with me, so help me God, I will tease him until his damn balls explode.

"Hahahaha." He laughs back. "You wish this was Grant, beautiful." I hear the click of him letting go of the button.

"Hello? Hello?" I call down again, but no one is there. "Stupid fucking kids." I try to brush it off, but in my heart, I know that was not a kid.

I get all the way to my bedroom when the buzzer rings again. Now I'm getting scared. My body starts to tremble as I slowly make my way back to the buzzer. I take a deep breath and press the button, trying to hide my fear. "Who is it?" I snap.

"It's Grant. Let me in." I hit the button, and in a matter of minutes, he's at my door knocking. When I open the door, his brows are furrowed with concern. I jump into his arms, needing his strength. "What's wrong, baby?"

"Someone was messing around with the buzzer. It freaked me out. I'm sorry I snapped at you."

"I'll be right back." He runs back down the stairs. No doubt looking to see if he spots anyone. He comes back a few minutes later. "I don't see anyone hanging around." He closes the door, locking it behind him.

He presses his lips to mine and says, "Maybe we can take your mind off of things. I missed you this week." He steps even closer with a predatory glare.

"I like the way you think, and we have plenty of time, but I need to shower, I've been cleaning all day."

"After." He scoops me up over his shoulder and carries me to my room, slamming the door behind us. He slides me down the front of his body, causing my shirt to rise, exposing my breasts. "How the fuck am I going to work around you at the base for two entire weeks without being able to touch or kiss you?"

"I don't know, but I think we can have fun with it."

His lips crash down on mine. "You're my drug, and I'm totally addicted." He peels my shirt off and tosses it across the room. Leaning in, he peppers me with kisses from my collarbone to my ear, and he whispers, "I love the way you smell. It's such a turn on." He bites down on my ear, causing me to moan. My panties are soaked. I'm so worked

up from my fantasizing I'm already on the verge of coming. He hisses through his full, luscious lips when he slips his hands into my leggings and discovers the pool of excitement waiting for him. With an evil grin, he lowers to his knees, pulling my leggings down as he goes.

Part of me wants to run into the shower, and part of me wants him to take me right now. I know the first option is out of the question when he picks me up by my knees, sending me falling backward onto my bed. "You smell divine. I can't wait to devour this pretty pussy of yours." He licks through my folds and sucks on my clit, moaning in appreciation. "This is mine." He does it again.

"Yes, yours." I bite my lip.

"Good girl." He attacks my nub, licking it hard and fast. I'm so worked up I'm about to come when he abruptly stops.

"Grant," I complain.

"I know, baby. I need to savor you a bit longer." He slips two fingers inside of me, curling them, so they hit that magic spot deep inside me. My hips move on their own accord despite Grant trying to hold me still with his free hand. He pumps his fingers in and out of me as he licks at me. His thumb grazes my puckered hole, a feeling that is foreign to me, but I like it. It's sensory overload having him touch me in so many places at one time. His teeth graze my nub, sending me over the edge. I scream his name as he replaces his fingers with his tongue, lapping up every last drop of my release.

"Fuck me, Grant." Even with the most intense orgasm of my life still wracking my body I want more. I need to feel his cock pounding deep inside of me. I don't want soft and gentle. I need it rough.

I stop him when he pulls a condom from his wallet. "No condom. There's no need."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, now that I've had you bare, I don't want you any other way." I sound demanding and needy, but I don't care.

He leans over to kiss me, grabs at my hair and tugs it, changing the angle and deepening our kiss as he slams his cock balls deep inside of me. I moan into his mouth as he continues his assault on my pussy. I'm in heaven until he pulls out of me, leaving me desperate for more. My jaw drops. "Rollover," he demands, grabbing my hips. He flips me over and slaps me on the ass before he slams back into me.

"Fuck," I cry out. "Harder, Grant."

He holds onto my hips with such force I'm sure to have a bruise. He thrusts harder and harder, giving me what I want. This time he doesn't stop until my pussy clamps down on his cock, sending him over the edge with me. I scream out a stream of random words, not making a lick of sense because that was fucking amazing.

He presses his chest to my back, kissing me below my ear and whispers. "You're forgiven."

I burst into laughter. "I kind of figured, but thank you."

He slips out of me, pulls me up off the bed, and says, "We should go clean up. I don't need your father shooting me today because we showed up for dinner smelling like amazing sex."

"He wouldn't shoot you." His brows shoot up at my response.

"The hell he wouldn't." He shakes his head. "Besides, that's not a chance I'm willing to take."

He's probably right. Let's be real. My dad knows I'm no virgin, but that doesn't mean he's happy about it. I'm still his baby, after all.

We're about to leave for dinner when the buzzer rings once more. "Hello?" I call down agitated that someone keeps messing with me.

"It's Sloan, can I come up?" I look at Grant, who shrugs. I press the buzzer and wait for him to appear at the door.

"Oh." He stops short when he sees Grant behind me. "I'm sorry I didn't know I was interrupting."

I shake my head. "You're not. We're on our way out for dinner with my parents. What's up?"

He sighs. "I wanted to stop by to apologize. I know I was a dick about you two dating. I was jealous. I hoped we would become something. Anyway, I'm sorry." He shrugs his shoulders.

"Thanks, Sloan." I look over my shoulder to Grant, who appears impressed. "I'm sorry that it didn't work out that way, but I'm happy with Grant."

"I'm glad. I'll see you around. Okay?"

"Sure." He turns to leave without saying another word.

I lock up my apartment, and we follow behind him, so we're not late.

When we finally arrive at my parents' house, my sister's sitting in the living room with a ridiculous pout on her face. She is a grown-ass woman, and she is sulking like she's a ten-year-old. "What's wrong with you?" I ask the second I close the door.

"She's mad because she's acting like a five-year-old and was reprimanded for it." My dad wraps me in a hug and then shakes Grant's hand.

"How are you doing, sir?"

"I'm well, Grant. Thanks for asking." He looks past us to Piper. "Piper, dinner is ready." She rolls her eyes and storms past us.

"What's up with Piper? I thought she wasn't coming tonight."

My father shrugs and shakes his head. "I don't know, she's been such a brat lately. I don't understand what has gotten into her."

Grant links his fingers with mine, and we follow Dad and Piper into the dining room where my mom has prepared an Italian feast fit for a king. The table is loaded with two types

of lasagna, salad and tons of garlic bread. "Mom, we are only a family of five." I remind her teasingly.

"I know, but you like my veggie lasagna, and your father likes meat lasagna, so I figured I would do both. Plus, this way, Grant has an option too."

"That's kind of you, ma'am, but I'm not fussy. I grew up hungry, so I'll eat whatever you put in front of me." He shrugs. "I guess I have a bit of a different appreciation for food than most people."

"I'm sure you do." My mom gives him a caring smile. "However, that doesn't mean you shouldn't have choices. Now, dig in."

"Yes, ma'am." He picks up his plate and serves himself a little bit of both.

Piper is still sitting at the table sulking, like a little girl who just lost her puppy. She's picking at her dinner but not eating it. "Piper, what is wrong?" I try to sound concerned but I'm irritated with her behavior.

"None of your business." She takes a few bites of her food and excuses herself from the table. My father is beyond pissed. He drops his fork on the table and follows her out, grumbling an excuse me under his breath as he goes.

Grant and I look at each other like *what the fuck just happened*. My mom lets out a sigh. "Your sister is going through a jealousy thing. She and her boyfriend broke up right before you met Grant, then she met that other boy, but I guess it's not working out, and now you are getting your father's attention."

I roll my eyes. "Mom, I've always had daddy's attention, precisely because she acts the way she is right now."

"I don't know what to tell you, sweetie. Maybe you could talk with her."

"I tried. I invited her out with my friends, and the first chance she got, she tried to get me in trouble with Dad. She's ridiculous."

"Jealousy makes people do weird things. She's still young in that way. She thinks if your father sees your faults, he'll see the good in her. She fails to realize that your father is incredibly proud of her, but she won't see it until that ugly green monster is put to rest." My mom wipes her mouth and continues. "It's been worse since she realized how proud your father is that you signed up to serve our country."

"Speaking of serving our country." My father walks back into the room, and that's when we all hear the house door slam shut. "You two are leaving for annual training this weekend, correct?"

"Yes, sir." Grant answers him with a confidence that makes me proud. My father can be a scary guy, and I think it's so sexy that Grant can be confident but not arrogant or cocky.

My father looks down at the table, choosing his words carefully. "It's evident by the way you two look at each other that things are getting serious. You look at Jordan the same way I look at my wife."

"I care deeply for your daughter." His words rock me slightly.

My father nods. "I know, so watch out for her out there but watch out for yourself as well. You two can get yourselves into some trouble dating and being in the same unit and her being lower enlisted."

"My section sergeant is already aware, and we've had a conversation with her. We know we need to keep things quiet, and we will. Neither of us wants to hurt our military career. I'm starting at the University of New Hampshire when I get back, and I don't need to lose that opportunity."

"That's my girl. Now let's get this cleaned up so we can play cards."

Grant stands from the table, collecting plates to bring to the kitchen. I take that time to try and talk with my father about Piper so I can figure out what my next step with her

should be, but he doesn't want to discuss it. He brushes it off and says she needs to cool down. By the time we're done talking, Mom has the dishwasher loaded and is putting leftovers away.

She has two containers on the counter that she informs me are for Grant and me to take home. It's the rest of the veggie lasagna that Grant said he loved so much. This is why I love my family. This is his second dinner with us, and they're already treating him like part of the family.

"Come on. We need to start this card game," my father calls from the other room.

My mom rolls her eyes, and when we get back, my father is already dealing cards. "This game is called Hand and Foot," he explains to Grant. "It's played with multiple decks of cards." He hands Grant some and tells him to deal everyone eleven cards.

As they deal the cards, he explains the game. It's not a hard game to follow, but it takes practice. I can't help but laugh that my father took Grant on his team instead of playing couples. He's always been competitive, but I figured Grant was too new in our lives for that. I guess I was wrong.

"So, Grant, what is time in the field like for you?" my father asks.

"It's not too bad, usually. We go to the range to test-fire our weapons. I usually fire as an expert in both the 9MM and the M4. I prefer my handgun, but we fire both. I contemplated going to sniper school for a while but decided against it even though it would've given me a leg up on the force."

"You can still do it. What are your goals for the force?"

I roll my eyes because, as much as I love getting to know more about Grant, I knew my father would want to talk business. "Really, Dad? Can we talk about something other than work?"

"I'm sorry, I'm trying to get to know him. I need to be sure he's good enough for you." My father winks at me, and

we continue playing the game.

"I eventually want to be on the SWAT team. I want to be on the front lines, taking down the top drug dealers in the city." I smile proudly until it dawns on me how dangerous that is.

"Really, Grant? That's pretty dangerous," I point out, as if he doesn't know.

My father's eyes go wide. "No more dangerous than what you did at the studio to take out an intruder yourself." Leave it to my father to bring up what he considers to be a mistake.

I roll my eyes. "I am never going to live that down, am I?"

"At least he's trained to handle those situations." My dad and Grant not only win the argument but the round.

"Whatever." I have no desire to argue with them. What they fail to realize is that I managed to hurt the intruder far worse than he hurt me, and at some point, they'll realize I can hold my own.

"What do you have to do to become a member of Boston's SWAT team?" my mom asks him.

"It's quite a process. The first thing I did after basic was to get my associates degree, and I've been signing up for voluntary training. It's one of the reasons I work so hard on my marksmanship. I spend a lot of time at the range working with my different weapons. A big piece of SWAT is being able to fire your weapons as an expert."

"I didn't realize you went to the range so much," I say smugly, throwing down the rest of my cards, winning the hand for my mom and me.

"I typically go early in the morning before my shift." He informs me frustrated that he didn't get to finish playing his cards. "It's much quieter at that time of day."

"But isn't it good to practice with distractions?" my father asks.

"Yeah, if you can get a lane." He gives my father his point total and continues on. "It's not the distraction that bothers me. I don't typically have a ton of time, so I want to go, get my rounds in, and get out so I can head to work."

We have one more hand to play, and it's getting late, so Grant and I shuffle the cards while my parents finish tallying points. This game is fun, but it takes a long time to play, and you have to play with five decks of cards, so shuffling them is not easy.

We dive into the last hand, still discussing work stuff. Only now, the topic has gone back to our annual training. Grant is explaining to my parents how it all goes down and filling me in at the same time. I'm tired of listening to him discuss all the work we have ahead of us.

It ends up being a quick hand, mom and I win the game. The guys couldn't get any cards down, which I find quite amusing. My dad hates that hand because you have to have seven cards of one number before you can play anything else, and he struggles with it. He's likes to complain, grumbling about how stupid the round is. "We'll get them next time, Grant."

"Yeah, we will." They fist bump each other from across the table. My mother and I burst into laughter.

"These two really think they have a chance." She laughs again.

"Just wait. I'm still learning the game. I'll get my strategy down, and we'll get you two."

"If you say so, babe." I get up from the table to grab the game bag that my mom stores her cards and such in, so we can put everything away before we head out.

"I got it," my mom says. "You two get going, you both have to work tomorrow."

"Thank you, Mom."

"It's no problem. Thanks for staying and visiting with us." I kiss my mom on the cheek and hug her goodbye.

Grant wraps my mom in a hug. "Thank you for dinner, ma'am."

"Grant, if you don't start calling me Valerie, we're going to have problems." Grant instantly blushes.

"Thank you for dinner, Valerie. It was delicious."

"That's better. Now you two have a good night."

He shakes hands with my father, and we head back to my place for him to drop me off. Part of me wishes he would stay, but we haven't discussed spending an entire night together yet, so neither of us are ever prepared to stay out.

"What's wrong?" he pulls up outside my apartment. I guess I was more lost in thought than I had realized.

I shrug. "I was thinking about how nice it would be if you spent the night with me." A sexy grin plays at his lips. "What?"

"Do you want me to stay?" I bite my lip and nod.

I know I'm falling hard and fast, but I can't help it. I love being around him. He makes me feel so good. When we're together, my cheeks hurt from smiling so much. "I do."

"Then I guess it's a good thing I have an overnight bag in my trunk, in case I get stuck somewhere."

My eyes light up. "Really?" He nods. "I was thinking about how we've never discussed it, so neither of us are ever prepared."

"Baby, I'm always prepared." He cuts the engine and runs to the trunk. He pulls out a big black bag that is completely full.

"What is in there?"

"Everything I need to spend the night out. A change of clothes, a uniform, my hygiene kit. You name it. If I could need it, then it's in here." He takes my hand and walks me across the street.

"Is this part of your SWAT training?"

"No, I want to be ready in case I need to take a shift, or something goes down, and I'm stuck working a double." When we get into my apartment, he continues on. "I had a

guy vomit on me once. It was pretty nasty. It's the only time I ever needed my spare uniform, but I was damn glad I had it."

"Hey, guys." Cory comes out of her room.

"Hey, did we wake you?" She looks exhausted, which is strange for her because she's usually up so late."

"Nah, I was chilling. I thought I'd say hi before I turn in for the night."

"Are you good?" She looks down.

"Yeah, I'm doing some work from home." She shakes her head.

"That sucks girl. I'm sorry."

"It's all good." She waves me off. "Have a good night."

"Have a good night." We both reply.

She turns, dragging weary her body to bed.

"She doesn't look too good," Grant takes note.

"I agree. I hope she's not coming down with something."

I shut all the lights and double check that the door is locked before we head to my room for the night. We both strip down and climb into bed. I turn on the TV, snuggling up on Grant's chest to watch some LivePD.

"Good night, beautiful." He kisses me on the head.

"Good night, Grant."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

GRANT

DESPITE JORDAN'S incredibly comfortable queen-size bed, I woke to her soft snoring. I watch her sleep for thirty minutes, fighting the urge to call in sick. She's so sexy, I want to spend the morning buried deep inside her, but I know she needs to sleep so she can go by the studio later.

I go into stealth mode, climbing out of her bed, trying not to wake her. I head to the bathroom to brush my teeth and get into my gym clothes, despite the fact that I sent my boy Levi a text saying I wouldn't be meeting him today. Of course, that led to getting my balls busted because I haven't been working out as much, but I don't care. Sleeping in late, cozied up next to Jordan, is totally worth it.

When I get back to the room to gather my bag, the little snore that woke me is back and a bit stronger. I quietly chuckle before leaning over to plant a soft kiss on her forehead. She groans as her beautiful blue eyes flutter open. "Good morning." Her voice is soft and groggy.

"Good morning, baby. I gotta go, but I'll call you after work." I lean down to kiss her again, this time on her full, soft lips.

"I'll walk you out." She climbs out of bed, the chill from the air-conditioning prickles her skin causing her nipples to harden beneath her skimpy tank top. My mouth waters with the need to suck on them.

I pull her to me. "You should have stayed in bed. Now I'm going to be late." My eyes rake over her sexy body.

She giggles. "Oh no, you're not."

She bites her lower lip when I wrap her hair around my hand, tugging her head backward. My lips crash down on

hers in a passionate kiss. I drag my lips up her jaw to her ear. "I will be thinking about you and these perfect breasts all day," I whisper before grabbing a handful of breast, and scraping my teeth over her nipple, causing her to suck in a sharp breath. "Bye, beautiful."

I turn to close the door behind me, and I catch a glimpse of her standing there with her jaw dropped. Before I even get to the car, I have a text from her.

Jordan: You're going to pay for that.

Grant: Are you threatening a police officer?

Jordan: Nope. Not at all. I would never do such a thing. I'll see you Thursday.

Grant: Plan to stay at my place.

Jordan: I look forward to it.

This girl is going to drive me insane during our two weeks of annual training, and I'll need to keep my hands to myself. Fuck that. I'll figure something out. If I go two weeks watching her strut around in her uniform, my balls will be dragging on the ground. They're already aching as thoughts of what I want to do to her occupy my mind during my drive to work.

When I pull into a spot at the precinct, I note the time and realize I have to get my ass in gear. As much as I love Jordan consuming my time, I need to stay focused on the task at hand and my future goals. Shortly after we get back, she'll be taking classes during the day and teaching at the studio five nights a week, so I'm planning to take another course at the same time.

I grab my bag from the back and hurry inside to change. It's frowned upon for us to travel to and from work in

uniform. I barely make it in time for the morning brief, and when I take a seat next to my partner, he has a shit-eating grin on his face. "What are you smirking at?"

"You. This chick has you going crazy, huh?" He crosses his arms over his chest and gives me a knowing smile.

"What makes you say that?"

"You never get in this late, you weren't at the gym this morning, and I heard you've been skipping out on the range." Lynch is usually at the gym in the morning when I get there. He's worked out with me a few times, but he likes to work out alone. I should have known he would notice I hadn't been going. He loves to bust my balls. It's a cop thing. "You do what you want, but you've talked about the SWAT team for a while now, don't let this girl cause you to lose focus of your goals."

He's right. This is all I've wanted since I decided to join the force. I also know damn well that she would never come between me and my career. She wants to see me succeed as a cop as much as I want to see her succeed as a dancer.

"She'll be working nights soon. I'll probably start going to the gym after work, so it doesn't interfere with our time together."

"Dismissed!" the captain barks.

"And you know damn well I won't lose focus or let anyone, or anything stand in my way. Jordan has her concerns about SWAT, but I know she wants it for me just as much as I do." I leave the room with Lynch following behind me.

"Dude, what the fuck is your problem?" Lynch asks jogging to catch up with me as we cross the parking lot to our squad car.

I shake my head. "It's my bad. I'm trying to spend as much time with her as I can. She's going through a lot with this guy stalking her, and now the guy is threatening me."

"Did something else happen?"

"A dude was messing with her doorbell. She says it was some kids, but I think it was him. It kills me that this guy knows where she lives, and there's only so much I can do to protect her. Not to mention he won't stop texting us. It's getting old, and we have no leads."

"I didn't mean to piss you off. I don't want to see you lose your way. You're a damn good cop, and you've worked hard for this. It's clear you care a lot for this girl, and as things get serious, it would be easy to do." He pulls out of the parking lot.

"I know. You're right. I'm sorry."

"One of my jobs is to mentor you, and that's all I'm trying to do."

Now I'm feeling bad because I was giving Lynch shit, and he was just trying to watch my back. He's right, that's what partners and mentors are supposed to do. We pull up to this abandoned parking lot we like to sit in while we wait for shit to go down, and the second he shuts the car off, he looks over at me.

"I appreciate you having my back, but right now we need to focus on figuring out what is going on with this stalker."

"It's all good. Has she heard from that guy Sloan anymore?"

I nod. "Sloan showed up at her house."

He narrows his eyes. "For what?"

"He apologized for being jealous of us. He left right after."

"Does that sit right with you?" he asks, knowing full well it shouldn't.

I shake my head. "Nope, but we have nothing to go on. You know as well as I do the description of the guy who bought the flowers doesn't match his description, and he paid with cash, so we don't have shit."

"It sucks waiting for these guys to screw up and actually give us something."

"Tell me about it. Did Forensics ever go back to the studio to search for the camera?" I sigh.

"They did, and they found one small camera set up outside the studio. It was attached to the awning. Anyone can go back at any time and easily replace it."

I shake my head. "I don't want to talk about this right now. It's stressing me the fuck out. How're Mary and the kids?" I ask, changing the subject.

"They're good." The car becomes silent. "I know you don't want to talk about it, but how's Jordan doing?"

"She's good. Our schedules are about to become very busy. We have annual training soon, and then her dance season kicks back up. That means opposite shifts for us, which is why I haven't been at the gym. I want to spend time with her in the morning when I can."

"Mary has been asking when she's going to get to have you two over for dinner."

"That would be cool. It'll take Jordan's mind off things for a bit. I'll talk to her, and we'll plan something." Since I joined the force and we became partners, we've never gotten together at one another's house. It's always been at the pool hall or meeting up somewhere else. I don't typically bring work home with me. I like my personal life to be somewhat private, and he's been working on his house slowly over the last few years, one project after the other.

A pimped-out Dodge Durango goes driving by, windows tinted far darker than the legal limit. "Let's roll," Lynch says.

I flick the switch for the siren and call in the plates on the vehicle to see if there are issues with the car. The driver pulls over immediately. We both get out of the vehicle. We hear back that the vehicle has not been reported stolen as we approach the car.

"Can I help you, officer?" a black male with long dreads pulled back in a thick ponytail responds.

"Do you realize your tint is darker than the legal limit?" Lynch informs him.

He shrugs. "So are half the vehicles in Boston." Lynch is pissed that this guy is not taking him seriously.

"I'm getting a whiff of marijuana. Are you carrying?" Lynch asks next.

"Yes." He starts to pull it out, but Lynch tells him to keep his hands on the wheel where he can see them. "It's within the legal limit. Weighed it myself."

"Step out of the vehicle, please," Lynch asks. He is one of those guys that's on the fence with the marijuana thing.

The guy steps out, and as he does, I pull open the passenger's side door and ask the same of his buddy. Both guys are big enough to be lineman for the New England Patriots. This dude is so wide I need to link two sets of cuffs to detain him.

Lynch isn't so kind. He slams the driver against the car. "Yo. Easy, bro. I did nothing wrong." These are the things that I disagree with, but for the most part, he's a good cop.

"Pat them down," Lynch barks out as he pulls his detainee away from the car. The two men take their place in front of our vehicle. The guy that said he was carrying directed me to his left pocket. "Is there anything else in there? Anything that can poke me or stab me?"

"Nah, man, just the baggie of pot."

He's honest with me. There's nothing else on them, but Lynch is convinced there's more, so he calls in the K9 unit for backup. While we're waiting, I stand there talking to the guys like I always do. "Come on, guys, tell me the truth. Is he going to find any more in that vehicle?"

He shakes his head. "Nah, I told you it smells in there because I'm carrying on me. My boy got this for me, so I had to go get it."

The K9 shows up, and now the guy is getting mad. "You're going to let that mutt all up in my car?" I quirk my

brow at him. Usually, when guys start to complain about K-9, it's a sign they're up to no good.

"Yes, unless you want to tell us where the rest is stashed," I inform him.

"Nah, cause I ain't got any more, but I'm telling you this. You're going to pay to have my vehicle detailed when you're done because I've been honest, and I don't want my car smelling like no dog," he barks out, mad that the dog is now going crazy jumping in and out of the car. The dog runs straight through to the back, where we already have the hatch opened. The dog takes a seat on the cover to the wheel well telling us he smells more. Sure enough, when Lynch opens the cover, the smell of pot is so strong it punches you in the face. There's no mistaking it. The spare tire is missing, and there are several one-pound packages individually wrapped and stuffed inside. I look at the guy. "I'm not sure what laws you've been reading but that there is far more than the legal limit."

He sucks his teeth again and looks up at his boy, who is at least a head taller than him. "Man, I told you not to help that fool."

"What fool?" I ask him as Lynch calls for backup to take these two to the precinct.

But before he can go any further, I read him his rights. We don't want any of the information he feeds us to be thrown out because of the Miranda law. I then tell him if he agrees to help us get the bigger fish, we may be able to help him, but he shakes his head no and tells me there's no way he's ratting anyone out. He'd be dead before the case ever got to trial, and the sad reality is, he's probably right. They would bail him out themselves just to kill him.

As soon as the guys are picked up, I get a smug look from Lynch. "Still think you can trust people?"

"Fuck you, dude." I shove my partner with laughter. We have this debate all the time over trusting our gut and trying to see the good in the people of our city. "I never said

everyone is good or that everyone tells the truth, but this situation is different from the last one. Those cops were dicks even though they knew the guys did nothing wrong.”

Lynch laughs as we walk over to our car to wait for the tow. Once it’s cleared, we have to bring all the evidence back and write up the reports.

Officer Trent comes over with his K9. “Hey man, nice bust.”

“Thanks.” I kneel down before his dog to scratch his head. “How’s this awesome boy doing?” His dog jumps onto my knees and licks my face, excited to get attention. “Yeah, you’re a good boy, finding those drugs,” I coo.

Trent laughs. “If you guys are good, I’m going to roll.”

“Yeah, we’re good. As soon as the tow truck gets here, we’ll be heading back to write it up.” He opens the back door for the dog. He automatically jumps in and takes a seat to wait for his partner.

“Thanks for the backup,” Lynch says.

“No problem, guys. Anytime.”

Suddenly our radios crackle, and we all stop to listen in. “That’s me. See you guys around.” He jumps into his SUV and heads off to help with the next situation.

The tow truck comes and hauls away the vehicle. Once it’s signed off on, Lynch and I head back. As soon as he parks, he says, “You start the paperwork, and I’ll get this turned in.” I’m about to argue, but one of his buddies comes over, and they start talking. It’s normal for the lower-ranking officer to do the paperwork. They call it training, I think it’s a crock of shit. No one likes to do the reports. They’re a pain in the ass, but I don’t want to be here all night, so rather than put up a fight, I head in to do what I gotta do. The paperwork can be insane sometimes, especially when drugs are involved.

It takes me almost the rest of our shift to get it done. As I’m finishing, Lynch comes strutting in with a cocky grin on his face. “How’s that paperwork?” Lynch laughs.

I shake my head. "Where the fuck have you been?"

"I got tied-up at the evidence locker."

"Seriously. That was some tie up." I shake my head, tossing the paperwork at him. "Read it and sign it." I head to the locker room to change. *Fucking slacker.* He pulls that disappearing shit from time to time. I never used to mind, but it gets old.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

JORDAN

“WHY ARE you all shits and giggles this morning?” Meg asks when I practically skip into the studio.

“Moi?” I ask with a giggle.

“Yeah, you.” She plants her hands on her hips.

“I spent the most amazing evening with the best boyfriend on this planet.” I twirl around, exaggerating my joy. I spent last night at Grant’s house so we could enjoy one last night together before leaving for the field. Meg rolls her eyes. “Here she goes, Marianne. She’s going to be making us jealous for months over her hot cop boyfriend.” Marianne shakes her head at our banter.

“Don’t be too jealous. We’re in for a tough two weeks. We are breaking some serious regs dating one another,” I pout. “It’s going to be so hard to be around him and not flirt or touch him.”

“Are you serious?” Marianne asks.

“I am,” I explain how we’re not supposed to be dating because he’s a Staff Sergeant and I’m lower enlisted. It wouldn’t be as bad if we were both noncommissioned officers, but because I’m not, we have to keep it quiet.

Marianne shakes her head but doesn’t give me any grief. “Are you all packed?”

“Somewhat. I spent the night at his place last night. We both agreed we need to go home and go through our stuff tonight since we have to be at our unit by 0700 tomorrow morning.”

“I guess we won’t be seeing you at the pool hall anytime soon.”

I shake my head. "Not for at least two weeks, but let's plan something for when I get back. We'll need a night out and you missed playing with us the last time we all got together."

"Sounds good," Meg says.

"Now that you two have filled your social calendar, can we get to work?" Marianne cocks an eyebrow and plants her hands on her hips. The smile she's sporting lets us know she's only half-serious.

We both laugh. "What do you want to work on today?"

"I got the cut music back for the littles, so we need to figure out their tap routine." Meg and I take off to the back to grab our tap shoes while Marianne sets up the music. She has a friend of hers that cuts music, which is awesome because it's hard to do, and most songs are far too long for a dance routine. We can't have the littles on stage for three and a half or four minutes. They'd never last. They get two minutes max, and then we hurry them off.

Marianne has the music playing when Meg and I walk back out. We take in the music, listening to the beat. Sometimes it's hard to take it down a notch for the littles, our feet instantly start moving, flowing to the beat of the music, but we have to remember these are girls that can barely manage a basic tap move at a slow pace.

As we move, Marianne takes notes and reminds us of the steps she wants to teach the five and six-year-olds. We have to be careful not to make it too difficult, but at the same time, remember that they have months to learn the new steps we're going to teach them. The older girls are easier because they have the basics and can handle working a bit harder to learn something new. We never know from day to day how much effort the younger ones will put in.

Once we get through the first twenty-four counts of music and it's all documented in the notebook for that age level, we can move onto another song. The great thing about the little ones is they'll repeat steps, so the

choreography only needs to be twenty-four to forty-counts of music, and then they can repeat those steps over and over. If they're more advanced, we may change it up a bit, but we won't do that for this group of girls for quite a while.

"Since we're in tap shoes, let's keep going with this. The pre-teens are dancing to "Tainted Love," by Ed Cobb. I have an idea for how I want them to enter the stage." Marianne gets up from her seat on the floor and takes stage left, showing how she wants the girls to enter the stage. "This is super easy. They'll walk in toe-heel and snap their fingers to the beat of the music, like this." She walks across the floor, crossing her left leg over her right, bouncing her hand and snapping her fingers. We both follow her, and when the music continues, Meg and I feel out the music to see where it takes us.

Dance is all about feeling the music and expressing the song through your movements. Sometimes that's easier to do than others. Sometimes we're so far off from what Marianne feels that she guides us to what she wants, and sometimes we blow her away. It's the best part of working as a team.

We work on our routines for the next forty-five minutes before taking a break. I head over to our computer in the tiny office by the front door and start on some marketing. Registration is this weekend, and I've done everything I can to make sure that these ladies are good to go without me.

I'm about to ask them what they want for lunch when Grant comes walking through the door looking sexy as ever. "Good afternoon, Officer Summers. What brings you here on this fine afternoon?" I wink at my man.

He starts laughing. "We have to be sneaky starting tomorrow, but I'm pretty sure your friends know you're my girlfriend, so stop with the 'officer' bit." He leans on the counter with his megawatt smile on display.

"Just practicing." I lean forward on my fist.

"I'm riding solo today and thought maybe we could do lunch." He wiggles his eyebrows at me.

"Where's your partner?"

"Out sick." He shrugs. "He had something at school for his daughter. He decided to take a sick day instead of vacation time. He warned me that he was taking the day, but they had no one to ride with me today, so I'm on my own."

"Well, I guess it's lucky for you that I can escape today. That said, I'm kind of nasty from dancing, so we need to go somewhere casual."

He pulls me close. "You look delicious."

"Not in here, Officer Summers," Marianne warns with a teasing smile. She's quite delighted that I've found myself a nice, attractive young man.

"My bad." He lets go of me but continues to hold my hand. "Can I steal her for lunch?"

"Of course you can. The girl needs to eat." She shoos us away from the desk.

"Give me one second to throw my T-shirt on." I'm wearing nothing but a leotard with shorts. I would say by the way Grant keeps glancing down at my breasts that he agrees. I shouldn't go to lunch this way.

I feel his eyes on me as I walk away to find my shirt. I know he's been busted when Marianne calls him out on it. "Hey, eyes over here," she shouts loud enough for me to hear. I can't help but giggle.

When I get back, he's asking Marianne if she's had any issues around the studio. They still haven't found the guy that broke in. Everyone is so concerned that the guy knows my face, but I'm starting to think he was some druggie that needed fast cash and could care less about hurting anyone. The few things that are happening lately—the flowers, notes, and photos—don't seem to fit that guy's M.O.

"You ready, babe?" he asks me.

“Sure.” We each climb into our own vehicles. I would have loved to ride together, but he needs to be available in case of an emergency, so I follow him to Oh So Good.

When we get inside, I’m surprised to find there’s a line. The last time we were here, the place was nearly empty. “I told you this place does well,” he says, walking up behind me.

“It should. The food is delicious. I was shocked to see such a nice wholesome place in the middle of Boston.” We both step up to place our order. I ask for a grilled chicken, avocado bowl with brown rice, and he gets his usual quinoa bowl. He pays for lunch and informs them we’re eating there. I grab our number and find us a table in the corner.

When he joins me, I ask him, “Do you usually take lunch?”

“Nah, typically, we eat in our car. There are days when lunch is a protein bar on the go, but today, since I’m alone, I called in and said I was taking a few minutes to get food.”

“Well, it was a nice surprise.”

“I’m glad it made you happy. I figure the next ten days will be brutal, so we should spend what time we can together now.”

“I wish we could ride in together tomorrow. I think it’s crazy we’re both leaving cars, but I haven’t been there long enough for us to even try pulling it off that we’re friends.”

“Yeah.” He shakes his head. “We could probably pull it off, but I think it would raise suspicion and I don’t think we should do that.”

“Agreed. We’ve certainly been seen hanging together but not to the point where we would get away with it.

“I’m glad I was there for you that first day. You have no idea how hard it was to focus after that. You caught my eye from that very moment.” He grins. “I was already trying to figure out how I was going to continue making excuses to talk to you.”

My cheeks instantly heat. "You can stop with that now. We're already dating."

"I will never stop complimenting you."

The waitress brings over our lunch, and I take the opportunity to change the subject. "Anything I should pack that I may not have thought of?"

"Baby wipes, powder, extra socks, both sets of your boots." He rattles off a shortlist of things as he digs in.

"I have all that stuff. I have a huge pump bottle of hand sanitizer, too."

He nods. "Good. Shit's gross out in the field, and you won't get a shower for at least the first four days." I roll my eyes. I enjoy a good shower. That was one thing about boot camp I hated. We got to shower daily except for the three days we spent in the field. I also have my own little first aid kit that I created. Most would go on sick call but fuck that. I have Tylenol, band-aids, moleskin for blisters, and plenty of Neosporin. If I need anything else, I'll have to report for it. I don't have a ton of room in my bag, so it's bare essentials only.

We continue to eat our lunch, keeping conversation light. I know he doesn't have a ton of time to eat, and neither do I. The longer my lunch break, the later I'll be at the studio, and I don't want to be there late. I want to get home, so I can go through my stuff one last time to ensure I have everything.

Cory is going to have dinner ready, so we can eat as soon as I get home, and then she'll help me finish packing. Then it's off to bed. Tomorrow will be a long day between getting to the unit and then riding in the convoy to Fort Drum, the base we will be training at for the next two weeks. As we're finishing, he gets a call over the radio. He announces he's back and then tells me he has to go. We both quickly dump our bowls and rush outside. "I'll call you tonight." He gives me a peck on the lips and just like that he's gone, off to assist with a traffic stop. It's at that moment I start to

understand my father's concern for my actions. It's also the moment I realize that I'm starting to care a great deal for Grant. I stand there for a second, silently praying he makes it through his shift unharmed.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

JORDAN

THE ENTIRE CONVOY comes to a halt. "That's the gate to get onto the base," Staff Sergeant Cummings explains as we sit here in the steaming hot five-ton truck patiently waiting.

Most of these trucks do not have air conditioning, so it's been a long ride, but we used the time to get to know one another a little bit better. We listened to music and had girl talk.

Once we start moving again, it's another fifteen to twenty-minute ride across the base. We pass a bunch of brick buildings and another convoy before we arrive at a huge open field with dirt roads and nothing in view for miles except a few random trees. The base looks much like Fort Lee. It amazes me how the buildings don't change much from base to base.

It's hard to envision that this huge, open flat piece of land will be our home for the next two weeks, but it will. When we left this morning, each unit section had a truck with its own essentials loaded into the back of it. Being in the supply section, we have to transport a lot more, and I'm assuming as we put tents up, the place will take shape.

Sergeant Jamison is the unit armorer. He and Sergeant Clark drove the weapons down in a locked truck in the middle of the convoy so it could be watched over by the unit. The MPs all carry their own 9MM. Part of their training is to be sure the M4s arrive safely. Our truck has the firing pins for the M4s and some ammo, but the firing pins and ammo never travel with the weapons. It's a safety issue. If the truck were to be hijacked, they'd have the M-4s, but without the firing pins, the weapons would be

useless. We also have the extra Meal Ready to Eat, or MRE's as we call them. Tents, camo netting, folding tables, and so on also rode up with us. It's amazing how much you need for two weeks in the field.

"Stick with me. We have a lot to set up, and we have some jokesters in this unit who would love to fuck with a newbie." Cummings opens her door and climbs down.

"Yes, Staff Sergeant." I follow her from the truck. The commander waits for all the section sergeants to join us. Grant makes his way over with a few other guys I don't know. Once the commander has everyone's attention, he gives them directions, pointing out who he wants where. We get lucky. Our truck happens to be parked right by our setup point.

"Let's get to it," the commander says, dismissing us.

I catch Grant stealing a quick glance at me before he runs off to grab the rest of his men. Lord, help me. It's going to be a long two weeks. This man is panty combusting hot in his uniform. "Let's go, Smith."

"Yes, Staff Sergeant."

When we get back to the truck, there's a security detail around the weapons vehicle that has pulled up next to ours. Jamison and Clark have joined us to unload the tent. It's hot as hell out here, and the sun is beating down on us in this huge open field, but we need to focus on getting the set up done so we can unload the weapons that are being guarded by MPs.

The tent is huge, and it's heavy as hell. We ask for help from some of the soldiers from another section because it takes a good eight to ten of us to get this huge tent up, and we're only a four-person section. We finish close to an hour later, dirt and sweat running down our faces.

In the meantime, other sections have set up their sleep tents. I don't have to worry about doing that because Staff Sergeant Cummings and I sleep in the supply tent, which is fine by me.

Now that the tent is up, we get busy unloading and organizing everything that has to go in it. The heat is brutal, and the sooner we get this done, the sooner we can chill.

When we're finally called to evening chow, Clark, Jamison, and I all make our way over to the chow line. It's about a mile long. "I'm beat." Clark rubs the back of his neck.

"I hear ya. I can't believe how much we managed to accomplish today." I sling my M4 over my shoulder. Now that we're set up, and weapons have been distributed, we have to carry them with us everywhere we go.

"How's your first day going Private First Class Smith?" I turn to see Grant standing behind us.

"It's going well, thanks for asking Staff Sergeant Summers. How's your day going?"

Sergeants Jameson and Clark are glaring at him with concern in their eyes. "Clark, Jameson, you guys must know Staff Sergeant Summers."

"We do, but how do you know him already?" Clark asks.

I chuckle. "Funny enough, my dance studio was broken into, and Staff Sergeant Summers was the first officer on the scene after I called 9-1-1. We've been friends since." I'm hoping this will explain us hanging out and spending time together so that people won't get suspicious.

"Her father is also a fire chief who I happen to know. I promised him I would watch out for her while we are out here." They both look at me like *really*.

"It's true. He met my dad when he came to pick me up after I gave my statement at the station. When we discovered we were in the same unit, my father gave him a talking to."

When we get to the front of the chow line, the four of us gather our trays and take the hot meal, which doesn't look too appetizing. "This looks like it came from the freezer section of the grocery store."

"You pretty much nailed it, private." Grant chuckles.

It's a beef patty, mashed potatoes, carrots, and peas. We grab a bottle of water, and the four of us find a place to sit to eat our chow.

"So you're an actual cop, huh?" Clark asks him.

"Yeah, I joined the guard first, but my goal was to become a Boston cop."

I can't help the smile that's plastered on my face. This is perfect. I'm hanging out with my boyfriend while hanging with some guys from my section. This looks like nothing more than a crew of soldiers getting to know each other.

"What's the plan for the MPs this week?" Jameson asks him.

"Well, we're working on lanes training, and we have to qualify both during the day and night fire. Plus, we're rotating through security for the camp."

"I'm getting my military license this week," I announce proudly.

"That's awesome, ba..." He catches his mistake and corrects himself. "Smith. What are you driving?"

The guys look between the two of us trying to figure out what just happened, but I don't think they caught it.

I shrug. "No idea. Staff Sergeant Cummings told me on the way up here."

"She'll have to drive a deuce and a half, a five-ton, and a Humvee," Clark informs us.

"That should be interesting since you drive a little compact car."

If looks could kill, Grant would drop dead right now. "I beg your pardon. My daddy taught me how to drive in his Ford F250 pickup truck. I've even handled it in the snow."

His eyes go wide. "My bad. I had no idea you had skills." He holds his hands up in a defensive manner.

"Mmmhmm..." I finish eating my dinner while Clark and Jameson bust his balls for getting told off by me.

Clark and Jameson get up to clear their plates, and the second they do, Grant slips closer. "I'm sorry. Please don't be mad at me. I was trying to have fun without making it look like I was flirting." I soften slightly. "You know I think you're a badass." He grins at me.

I roll my eyes and shake my head. "Come on. Let's get rid of these trays, and then you can walk me back to supply."

We clear our trays, and on the way back to supply, he points out his tent. It happens to be set up directly behind mine. The tents are set up very close to one another in a circle. Supply is the largest. When he walks me into the tent, Staff Sergeant Cummings is there waiting. "Good evening, Staff Sergeant."

"Staff Sergeant." He nods. "Just walking your soldier back from chow. You have a good night now." He starts to walk out the door, but she calls after him.

"Staff Sergeant."

"Yes." He turns back to her, standing at parade rest.

"I hear you're on gate duty Friday."

"Yes, from twenty hundred hours to twenty-three hundred hours."

She walks up to him with a firm look in her eyes. "Private First Class Smith will be with you. I expect you to watch her back as a new soldier in this unit." She looks at him, dead serious.

He fights a grin. "Of course. I will be sure she gets back here safely after our shift as well."

"Good." She walks back to her seat, calling over her shoulder. "You have a good night."

"You as well." He winks at me and walks out of the tent.

I turn to her. "What did you do?"

"Shh. I gave you three hours alone with him. Don't do anything stupid to make me regret it." She's grinning ear to ear.

"I would never." We take a seat at her makeshift desk. "I can't believe you did that. Thank you." I'm beyond excited. I can't believe I'm going to actually get some time with him.

"Everyone has to pull a shift. The MPs do most of it, but when the Commander asked me who you would be comfortable with, I told him Summers and explained how you two had become friends since he came to your rescue."

"Was he suspicious?" I ask nervously.

"He looked a little concerned but said nothing. He told me to make it happen, and I did."

"What about Clark and Jameson?"

She shrugs. "What about them? They're guys, so he doesn't worry about them so much." She gets up from her desk. "Let's finish setting our stuff up." We walk to the end of the tent, where we have our two cots set up next to each other. "We should start getting ready for tomorrow." We both pull out what we need.

"The last thing we need to do for the night is to ensure that the mess crew is all broken down." I follow her out of our tent. Once we ensure the kitchen crew is good, she dismisses everyone for the evening.

Once back in our tent, I collapse onto my cot with some music playing through my air pods. I'm exhausted, so it only takes me a few minutes before I pass out.

CHAPTER

TWENTY

GRANT

SERGEANT WILLIAMS and I just checked in on the guys on guard duty at the entry point. It's already been a long week of annual training. One of our responsibilities is to make sure that someone is at the entry point to our camp at all times, and we've already had reports of people showing up late.

On most bases, the gates are guarded by MPs only, but we have soldiers in the unit taking shifts on guard duty that are not MPs for training purposes. They want everyone pulling their weight. Williams and I are section sergeants, so the gate is one of our many responsibilities while here.

"Are you ready to head over for lanes training?" Williams asks me.

"Yeah, we need to make sure our guys do this with perfection, or the First Sergeant will be all over our asses."

"You're not kidding. He's already warned us." We both hop into a Humvee and head over to the field we set up last night. When we arrive at the lanes, the guys are already being lectured by both the commander and the first sergeant. "Dude, this doesn't look good." I look at Williams concerned.

"Tell me about it." We both run over to see what's going on. The commander is livid. We stand behind our guys so we can hear what's going on without interrupting or distracting the men.

"So help me, God, if I find out one more soldier has taken off down this lane without his weapon in safe mode, this entire unit will feel my wrath. Am I clear?" He barks out at them.

"Yes, sir!" The two platoons shout out.

Fuck my life...if that was one of my guys.

The commander and first sergeant turn to walk away, but they spot us and make a beeline towards us. "Is my front gate squared away, Staff Sergeant Summers?"

"Yes, sir, it is." I throw him a salute.

"Good, these knuckleheads need a lesson in weapon safety before they take off down these lanes again." He shakes his head and looks at Williams. "Williams, Specialist Borden is on Kitchen Patrol for the next three nights. He will help prepare and clear dinner chow."

"Yes, sir." He nods his understanding.

I want to exhale a sigh of relief that the culprit isn't one of my guys, but I feel bad for my boy because Borden is one of his. Now I need to have a discussion with them before they take off again.

When we approach our guys, we find them all busting Borden's balls about his little fuck up. "What happened?" Williams barks out, pissed.

"I was running down the lane ahead of my buddy, and I hit the safety. I was attempting to fix it, but I tripped." The dude looks like he's about to shit himself.

"There was nothing there. The dude tripped over his dick." Alexander continues to fuck with the man. It's clear Borden feels shitty about it, and now he'll get his balls busted the entire time we're here.

"Jealous he's hung better than you?" Williams looks at Alexander dead serious.

"Oh shit," Everyone starts into an uproar.

"All right, enough already!" I shout out. "We are now behind on timing because of the situation. We went through all the safety briefs before we left, do we need to do it again?" I'm not happy. We spent our last two drills going over all of this.

"No, Staff Sergeant!" They all scream their reply in unison.

"Good. Let's get this shit done. Williams, run the lane with your boy. Make sure he's good." Williams nods, and while they're running the lane, I get to work, pairing others up and giving instructions.

The sound of a truck draws my attention to the next field over. There are two trucks parked, and one is zipping around expertly over bumps and through a course. It's not the noise that stops me in my tracks. Noises don't typically bother me, especially since we're trained to work around it. We prepare for bombs going off, trucks flying by, rounds flying over our heads. I stop and watch with a smile on my face because that's my girl driving it like a champ. I keep glancing over, and finally, I'm rewarded. The truck halts and my sexy as hell girlfriend climbs out of the driver's seat.

"Staff Sergeant!"

"Yeah." I look back to the specialist who is looking at me with a slight grin on his face. "Say one word Webster, and you'll be on guard duty the entire week."

He smiles. "Wouldn't dream of it."

I need to focus if I'm going to make it through this training.



It's been a long day, and I still need to pull my guard duty shift. There is only one thing helping me make it through this shift, and it's the fact that I get to do it with Jordan.

When I get to the supply tent, the flap is open. I walk in to find Jordan sitting at the desk with Staff Sergeant Cummings. "Good evening, ladies." Sergeants Clark and Jameson clear their throats, making me laugh. "My bad, and gentlemen."

"Obviously, we don't rate." Jameson slaps Clark in the chest playfully.

Clark shrugs. "Not one man here would see us with these two in the room."

"Way to brown nose, Clark," Staff Sergeant Cummings throws at him. "Nice try, but you still have to work Kitchen Patrol tomorrow morning." He rolls his eyes and goes back to his phone.

"Are you ready, Private First Class Smith?"

She jumps up from her seat, grabs her M4, and her cover, slipping it into place. "Sure. Let's do this."

We leave the tent together, and she automatically starts for the passenger's side door, but I quickly stop her. "No way."

"What?" She looks at me, confused.

"You got your license today, didn't you?"

"Yeah. How did you know?" She crosses her arms over her chest.

I take the same stance. "I saw you testing. Now you're going to show me how good you are."

She meets me at the front of the Humvee. "You act like I'm scared, Staff Sergeant Summers." She stresses sergeant knowing full well it drives me insane when she calls me that.

I grin. "Are you?"

"Hell no. Get in." She tries to sound all tough as she climbs into the driver's seat.

I shake my head as I climb into the passenger's seat. I love her sass. It is such a turn on, definitely not something I need right now, but it's too late for that.

She starts up the vehicle and heads off as I direct her through the camp to the gate where the two men we are relieving are waiting for us. We manage to pull up right on time, which by Army standards is technically late, but oh well.

The two guys let us know the password of the day is "Patton". This is information I already know because I come

up with the passwords. They jump into their vehicle and take off.

"What do we do?" Jordan asks as she glances around.

"This guard duty is simple and very different from pulling guard duty at the main gate, which is more of what we do as MPs, but it's important all the same." I usher her to the side of the road where a gate consisting of two wooden horses that we use to block the road are set up. There are two chairs we are allowed to use while we sit by the side of the road. "All we have to do is move the horse to allow soldiers through once we have verified that they're a part of the unit. At this time of night, most of the crew is here. There is a platoon out doing night fire, but they won't be back until after our shift is over, so it should be quiet."

"So, is this going to be a boring few hours?" She has a seat in one of the chairs.

"It can be, but it's dark, so maybe we can have some fun?"

Her brows shoot up. "Staff Sergeant Summers, what are you suggesting?"

I laugh. "There's a lot I would love to suggest, but that we can't do without getting ourselves in a ton of trouble. We're wide open, and there's nothing to hide us."

"You know, come to think of it, this is sort of perfect torture. I may have to speak with Staff Sergeant Cummings."

I burst into laughter. "It kind of is, but it's also nice. As much as I would love to have my hands all over that beautiful body of yours, it's nice to hang out and talk too."

"I agree."

I reach to put my arm around her, but I stop myself. It's a lot harder doing this on the down-low than I thought.

"Hey, I almost forgot to tell you. The girls asked when we were going to get together with your friends to play pool again. I told them we could plan something for when we got back."

“Sounds good to me.”

“Would you be upset if I invited Sloan. I think he feels bad about how he treated us. I’m hoping he’s over it, and we can go back to being friends.”

“I don’t mind as long as he doesn’t act up.”

“Nah, I think he’ll be good. He seems like he’s trying to accept our relationship.”

“Good. I need to redeem myself after you pulled that last little stunt, causing me to lose our game. I still hear about it from the guys.” It’ll be good to have a night out with our friends. We haven’t done that in a while, and after these two weeks we’ll need it.

“I didn’t pull anything. I walked up to the table to let you know I was there. It’s not my fault you couldn’t concentrate.”

“You didn’t intend to mess me up when you planted those perfect little curves directly in my line of sight?”

“What perfect little curves?”

“These perfect little curves.” I attack her sides, thighs, and hips discovering that she is incredibly ticklish. When she squeals loudly, I instantly shush her, but it’s too late, she’s been heard.

“Ha! We knew something was up between you two.” Jameson and Clark jump out from behind a tree they used to camo themselves.

“So much for down low,” Jordan says.

“So much for guard duty. You two failed hard in both areas,” Clark pokes fun.

“Listen, your secret is safe with us. We actually came to check on you guys.”

I look at him, confused. “Why would you need to check on us?”

An evil grin spreads across Clark’s face. “Because I know what it’s like to be young and in love.” Clark is obviously gay, and even though “Don’t ask don’t tell,” doesn’t exist anymore, he doesn’t openly discuss his love life around too

many people in the unit. It's hard enough trying to prove he can do his job like the rest of us. Openly gay men on the police force have the same problem.

"What does that have to do with anything?" Jordan asks, confused.

"You see that little tent right there?" Clark points at it.

"Yeah," Jordan says.

"It's for when it rains. You can sit in there to keep an eye on things from the entrance and not get soaked. We'll stand watch. You have fifteen minutes alone," Clark explains to her.

She glances over to the small tent set up to act as a guard shack. If you ask me, it's too soft. They should suck it up and stand in the rain.

"Wait a minute. How do we know you won't rat us out?" Clark looks at Grant, shocked.

"Come on, man. You know you don't rat out a fellow brother or sister. She's in my section. I would never do that. Besides, I think you two are cute together." Jordan and I chuckle but jump into the tent before anyone else can see us.

"Can you keep quiet?" I whisper to her.

Her eyes go wide. "I don't know. I've never tried." She giggles, but my lips crash down on hers. I drag my mouth from hers and whisper in her ear. "I don't like to rush, especially with you, but if we're going to do this, we need to make it quick."

"Let's do it."

I unbutton her pants and turn her around as I lower them as far as they will go, and then I do the same to mine. My dick is already hard. The mere thought of being balls deep inside of her gets me going. I whisper into her ear. "Get on your knees, baby." Once she does, I line myself up behind her, but I want to be sure she's ready, so I slip two fingers in and move them in a scissor motion. She's so wet

for me. It gets my dick even harder. It amazes me how tuned in to one another we are.

Replacing my fingers with my cock, she gasps, but I don't stop. I continue pumping into her at a steady rhythmic pace. My girl has a beautiful voice on her. I miss it. There's nothing better than her gasps and moans of pleasure, but right now, we need silence. The last thing either of us needs is to get caught. Her pussy clenches down on my cock, sending me over the edge with her, but our moment is cut short by trucks.

"Baby, get down." I collapse on top of her to prevent any shadows. There are chairs and such in here that help camouflage us.

"Good evening, sir." We stare at each other as we listen to the conversation.

"Sergeant Clark?" Shit, it's the commander. They're back early. "What are you doing here? You're not on guard duty tonight."

"No, sir, I'm not, but Smith had a headache, so we're watching the gate while Summers takes her back to get some Tylenol."

"Way to be a team player. That's good looking out for a lower enlisted," he says proudly.

"Yes, sir. I love helping the troops out."

"Keep up the good work."

"Thank you, sir."

We hear them pull the gates apart, and several large trucks roll through. We quickly fix ourselves up and hurry out of the tent as the last one passes through.

"Holy shit, that was close," Summers whispers to Clark and Jameson. "That was some quick thinking."

"Yeah, well, the commander is famous for checking on people, so when he asks you how you're feeling tomorrow be sure to let him know your headache is gone."

She wraps him in a hug. "You're the best."

"Yeah, man. We owe you one." I hold my hand out to Clark. He shakes it, but I pull him in and slap him on the back. "Whatever you need, just say the word."

"Hey, we may take you up on that one day." Jameson chuckles.

The two guys take off back toward their tents. Jordan and I open both flaps on the tent to air it out. It smells of army gear and sex—a weird combination. "There aren't too many good people like that in this unit. Be careful who you hang with," I warn her.

"Staff Sergeant Cummings keeps me close to her side, and I'm perfectly fine with that. I don't need to make friends with anyone other than you and my section peeps. I just want to do my training and get my degree."

The rest of our shift is extremely quiet. We make plans to get with our friends the weekend after we get back, but I also make plans with her for a romantic night at my place too. Lord knows after eight more days with her out here. I'm going to need it.

CHAPTER

TWENTY-ONE

JORDAN

IT WAS AN INCREDIBLY long ride from Drum back to our unit, and now I have to fight evening traffic to get home. The one positive is that Cory is home making me a hot, home-cooked meal. It's such a treat after ten days of MREs and field chow. It takes what feels like forever to get to my apartment, but when I do, I manage to snag a space directly in front of our building. For half a second, I contemplate leaving my stuff in the car but decide against it. Ten days of dirty clothes will leave my car smelling like ass.

With my rucksack over my shoulders, I start my trek up three flights of stairs. When I get to our door, I am greeted by the most wonderful aroma known to man. Garlic. I'm not sure what she's making, but it smells so good out in the hallway. I pull my key from my pocket and open the door to find her hard at work in the kitchen. She has our little table all set and ready for us to eat.

"Yay, you're back!" She rushes toward me but stops dead in her tracks. "You look exhausted and smell awful, no offense."

"Beyond. I'm tired, and I smell like dirt and Army equipment."

She scrunches up her face. "That is not a good combination."

"Oh, trust me, I know. Do I have time for a shower?"

"Please! Go shower." She waves her hand in front of her face.

I flip her off and walk to my room, listening to her laugh at me as I go. I dump my bag on the floor and put all my

dirty clothes in the laundry. I pull out a change of clothes and head for the shower. I told Cory we would hang out tonight, but I know there's no way that's going to happen. I'm so tired, I've yawned about five times since I've walked in the door. Hopefully, this shower will give me a boost. I feel bad. She made a nice dinner for us. I don't want to chew and screw.

Turning on the water as hot as I can possibly handle it, I strip out of my nasty uniform. As I'm about to climb into the shower, my phone pings.

Grant: Did you make it home, okay?

Jordan: Yeah. How did you know I was naked?

Grant: My spidey senses were tingling. I can't wait to have that body to myself tomorrow night.

Jordan: LOL. I need to shower. Cory is making dinner. You get to do that tomorrow, and then you can ravish my body.

Grant: I plan on it. Have a good night.

Jordan: You, too.

As I'm showering, my mind runs through the past two weeks. It was nice seeing Grant so much. He and I ate dinner with Clark and Jamison almost every night, and we all shared a lot of laughs. When no one else was around, they would tease us about our relationship. I was thankful that Clark informed me that Staff Sergeant Cummings didn't know about our sexcapade in the tent. I almost slipped a few times and then realized I needed to avoid the subject of Staff Sergeant Summers.

By the time I drag myself out of the shower, I feel a tad better. Without bothering to dry my hair, I head back to the

kitchen, where Cory is waiting for me. “Sorry, Cory. I really needed that shower.”

“No worries. It wasn’t quite ready yet anyway.” She hands me a plate, with turkey, Stove Top stuffing, garlic mashed potatoes, and carrots.

“Girl, you went all out.”

She shrugs. “I figured you would need it after being away.”

“You have no idea. I never want to see a plate of powdered scrambled eggs again.”

“Tell me you didn’t eat powdered eggs.”

I nod. “They taste so fake, but that wasn’t the worst of it. The eggs were better than some of the MRE options we had to eat.” I got lucky being in supply. We all got to pick our lunches before distributing them to others. “I tried to be brave and try things that others said were good, but it was a bad idea. They tasted awful.”

“Are those the meals that come in pouches?”

“Yup.” I dig into my dinner starving for real food. In between bites, I tell her all about it. “The pasta one isn’t bad, but there is a Vienna sausage one that Clark kept eating, and it looked and smelled disgusting. He tried to get me to try it, but there was no way I was putting that into my body.”

“It sounds awful.”

I shrug. “I ate a lot of chicken and pasta. The tuna casserole smells horrible, but if you can get past the smell, it doesn’t taste that bad.” I chug my water. “Besides, we went to the store on base when we first got there. We stocked up on snacks so we had something to eat when we were stuck with crap food.”

“That was smart. How did it go with you and Grant?”

I tell her about how we ate dinner together as often as possible and that it was arranged for us to be on guard duty together, leaving out the dirty details, of course. I’m not one to kiss and tell. She tries to pry more out of me, but I leave

it at we had fifteen minutes alone, and we made the most of it.

Her eyes go wide. "Oh, before I forget to tell you." She wipes her mouth. "You need to be careful. You left your bedroom window open. I didn't even notice it until three days ago."

My brows furrow. "I don't remember leaving my window open." In the fall, there is nothing like getting some fresh air, but to be honest, I don't get much of a breeze, so it's rare I open a window. "I didn't open a window." I shake my head confidently, remembering that I, in fact, didn't open the window.

"I'm telling you. Your bedroom window was wide open. It surprised me because the AC was still running." She gets up from the table with her plate. "I closed it and locked it."

My mind is reeling. When I went into my room, I didn't notice anything out of place, but how did my window get open? I'm trying not to freak out, but it's all I can think about. My thoughts finally get the best of me. I clear my plate and go back to my room. Standing in the doorway, I scan the entire room. The bed is still made—nothing on the floor.

"What's wrong?" Cory asks, making me jump. "Wow, are you okay?" She asks when she realizes she scared the shit out of me.

"Yeah. It's freaking me out a bit. I know I didn't open the window, so how did it get open?"

She shrugs. "I have no idea. Nothing was out of place, so I assumed it was you."

"Listen, I know it's way early, and I said I would hang out, but I'm exhausted. I'll help you clean up, and then I'm turning in."

I walk out of my room, leaving her standing there. When I turn back, she shakes her head and follows me. "Thanks again for dinner. It was fantastic."

"No problem."

"How's work going?" I ask as we clean up.

Her face lights up. "Good. Great, actually. My boss quit!" she claps her hands. "I didn't get to tell you."

"No way." I pack up the leftovers while she tells me about how her boss freaked out on her, and the executive director heard it. She got pulled aside and told them she quit.

"They pulled me into the office, and when I told them everything that had been going on, they asked me why I never reported it, and I was honest. I told them I wasn't sure they would believe me, and I didn't want to jeopardize my job."

"Wow! What did they say to that?"

"They explained that we have a human resources department to investigate these types of situations, and next time I have a problem like that I should go to them." A huge grin slides across her face.

"What?"

"I told them how I was thinking about taking human resource courses because of the situation, and do you know what they told me?"

"What?"

"That they would train me to help in human resources if I wanted to make a move."

"That's awesome!" I wrap her in a hug. "I'm so happy for you."

"Effective tomorrow, I'm the Human Resources Assistant." She holds up her wine glass. "To Karma."

"To Karma." I clink my water glass with her, and we finish cleaning up.

A yawn escapes me for the fiftieth time since I've been home. "Girl, you're beat. Go to bed. I got this."

"No, I'll finish." I hate the thought of her having to clean up by herself, especially since she did all the cooking, but I'm seriously exhausted.

"Stop. Go to bed," she demands.

"Are you sure? I feel so bad."

She gives me a look that screams, really. "Go."

"I owe you, and I promise to make it up to you. We hug one last time, and I take off to my room. I only got about three hours of sleep a night. It was too difficult to get comfortable on those ridiculous cots.

*I slip into bed and turn on the TV for some noise. I'm surfing through the channels with my eyes already getting heavy, but I fight to find something to watch, settling on *Law and Order SVU*.*

I suddenly feel chilly when I realize there's a heavy breeze through my room, but where is it coming from? I roll over to find my window is open, and the curtains are blowing. I sit up in my bed, my heart racing as I try to figure out how the window got opened. "Ha ha ha." I hear the man's laughter. It's the same creepy laugh that rang out over the intercom. "Looking for me?" He asks in his creepy raspy voice.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" I try to sound strong, but my voice betrays me. I wait for a response but hear nothing. Heavy feet stomp across the floor. Someone has gotten into my room. They're getting closer and closer. My heart is pumping so hard it's about to explode out of my chest. I reach over to turn on the light, but it's not working.

"It's no use. There's no power." The voice is a whisper directly in front of me, and yet I still can't see who's in my room.

"What do you want?" I shout angrily, tears running down my face.

"You. I only want you." He steps up beside me. His hand glides over my face and into my hair.

I sit up, panting, trying hard to catch my breath. My cheeks are stained from crying in my sleep. I reach over for the light, and this time, unlike in my dream, it works. The window is closed, but that's when I notice something I hadn't noticed before. On my nightstand is a small pile of pictures. They're of Grant and me, but they aren't mine. I have yet to print a single picture of us. I instantly grab my phone and call him.

"Babe, what's wrong?" His voice is groggy. I woke him up.

"Someone was in my room. They left pictures of you and me. I didn't see them at first. They weren't there at first." I'm rambling on confused and scared.

"Wow, baby, slow down. What are you talking about?" I can hear him moving around his room—no doubt, ready to come to my rescue once again.

"When I got home, Cory told me I left my bedroom window open, but I hardly ever open my window, never mind leave it open. I scanned my room earlier, looking for anything missing or out of place, but I didn't see them until now when I woke from a nightmare. They're sitting in a pile on the nightstand on your side of the bed." I say his side like he's spent a ton of nights at my house.

Cory comes running into my room. "Are you okay? I could hear you from my room."

"How did these get here?" I yell, pointing at the pile of photos.

With total confusion, she says, "I have no idea. When I closed the window the other day, I didn't notice them. That was the only time I was in your room."

"Baby, listen to me." Grant pulls me back to my phone conversation. "I'm on my way over." I hear his car start. "Don't hang up with me until I get there."

"Oh, I won't." That's a no brainer. My body is trembling, and I feel like I'm going to be sick.

"Want me to wait with you?" Cory asks. I nod, and she climbs onto my bed. We sit in silence as I look over at the photos.

"That one was taken after rock climbing," I point out to Cory.

Grant hears me and says, "Baby, don't touch them. We need to call it in and have them turned in as evidence. There may be prints on them."

"I didn't touch them. I can only see the top image."

"Good, I'll be there in five minutes."

"Thank you for coming to my rescue, yet again." My body is trembling and my skin glistening with sweat.

"You don't need rescuing. You're so strong, baby." I love that he tries to encourage me, but right now, I'm anything but strong.

"I don't feel like it right now. For the first time in my life, I have to admit, I'm scared." My sister was always the one to fear everything. My father used to tell her all the time. Why can't you be tougher like your sister? I used to laugh. I'm the younger one, and she'd call me to kill a bug or to sleep in my bed when we had a storm. Now I'm the one leaning on people.

"Baby. I'm here. Let me in." Cory and I both hurry to the living room to buzz him in. Neither of us open the door until we see him through the peephole.

He immediately wraps me in a hug. A minute later, he pulls me to my room. He questions Cory about the window, then calls Grayson who is on duty tonight. "He's on his way. He's patrolling not far from here." Another yawn escapes me. "Baby, why don't you call in sick tomorrow. It's already three in the morning, and now Grayson has to come to take pictures and dust for prints."

I shake my head. "If I call in, he wins. Besides, I'm better off at work, around people while you're at work. It'll keep my mind occupied. Plus, it should be an easy day. We're

going to go through all the registrations and sort them by age and class.”

“Okay, then at least lie-down.” He grabs my blanket and takes my hand, leading me to the couch. Cory places my pillow down for me and then gets herself comfortable on our love seat. Grant covers me and takes the seat beside me to wait. My eyes are getting heavy as he gently runs his fingers through my hair to settle me. They’re about to close when the buzzer rings. He kisses me on the forehead. “I’ll get it. Stay here.”

When Grant opens the door for his friend, I sit up with my blanket wrapped tightly around me. “Jordan, you know, Grayson.”

“It’s nice to see you again.”

“Same. Wish it were under better circumstances.” I nod.

Grant and I walk him to my room. “This is the pile of pictures she found when she woke from her nightmare. Cory found the window open several days ago but didn’t notice these on the table.”

Grayson walks over to the window and looks out. “Perp must have climbed up your fire escape.” He turns to Cory and me. “Was anything missing?”

“Not that we’ve discovered. At first, Cory thought I left the window open, but I didn’t. Like Grant told you, I didn’t notice these until I woke a little while ago.”

He clicks a button on his radio and calls it in. Grant was right. It’s going to be a long night.

CHAPTER

TWENTY-TWO

GRANT

“DUDE, it’s only Tuesday morning, why do you look like shit already,” Lynch says climbing into our squad car with a cocky grin.

“I haven’t slept since I got back from annual training.” Sunday, I never went back to sleep after the cops left Jordan’s place, and last night I kept tossing and turning trying to figure out how to catch this guy.

“How is she doing?” he asks, genuinely concerned. I feel like the shit going on at the precinct has brought us even closer. I think it’s cool he’s concerned.

“Dude, she’s scared.” I shake my head. “It’s to be expected. Not only was someone in her room but the photos they left of us just shows how much he is watching.”

“Any leads?” He pulls out of the parking lot so we can patrol the streets.

“Not yet.”

“I wish I was on duty so I could have been there for you guys.”

“It’s all good, man. The only thing either of us can think of is it’s the guy from the break-in at her studio, but we don’t understand how he got her address. He knows her face, but unless he knows her personally, or is connected to someone that does, he couldn’t know where she lives. I would think she’d have recognized him if he knew her that well.”

“It could be someone she hasn’t seen in years. Maybe he’s changed so much she no longer recognizes him.” He suggests.

"Maybe, or maybe Sloan isn't over her, and he's connected somehow."

"Who knows at this point. She needs to be careful."

"She and I had a long conversation about watching her back and being mindful of who is around her. She told me she's been watching to ensure she's not being followed. She has no idea how this guy could have found her."

Thank God Lynch likes to drive because I need time to think. I'm supposed to be scanning the streets for stuff going down, but it's hard to think when Jordan is the only thing on my mind. "I know you said she's been watching, but is it possible he could have followed her home from the studio one day?" Lynch pulls me from my thoughts.

I sigh. "I guess. Anything is possible. They dusted both the window and the pictures. There was a partial print on one picture. They're running it to see if it's enough for a match, but they didn't seem too confident."

"I can't believe the dude made that mistake."

"Huh?" The way he says it comes across as concerned, not happy that we have a chance at catching him.

"You know, you'd think he'd be more careful than that."

"You would, but some people aren't that bright." I must have misunderstood. I'm tired and am probably taking it the wrong way.

"If the guy was smart enough not to leave prints on anything else, how did he leave a partial one on of the pictures?" I shrug because I have no idea. She's coming over for dinner tonight, and I want to use the time to convince her to stay with me. How, I don't know, but I'm going to at least try. It's great she has a roommate now, but I still don't like the idea of her being there. I can't keep her safe if I'm not with her.

We're parked in one of our lots when a tall thin woman comes stumbling past us. She has one shoe on and one in her hand with her purse. Her hair is a mess, and her makeup is smeared. We both jump from the car. At first, I'm

unsure if she's hurt or on something. Lynch calls over to her. "Ma'am, are you okay?"

She stops and turns to us. "Who me? Oh yeah, I'm fine, officers." She tries to act sober, but it's no use.

"Ma'am, please stop walking." I hold my hand up to try to get her to stop.

She throws her hands up in the air, nearly hitting herself with her shoe. "I didn't do anything," she spits through her slurred words. "Ma'am, you're intoxicated and wandering the city alone. You have only one shoe on, and your clothes are disheveled." Lynch grabs her arm and pulls her toward the car.

"I'll call it in." I'm about to press the button on my radio when he stops me.

"We got it." He presses the front of her body against the car and pulls her hands behind her back to detain her.

I flick my body cam on for everyone's protection. I don't need this woman reporting us for doing anything inappropriate. We all know we should have female cops frisk female suspects. There are several on each shift for this reason.

"Am I under arrest?" the lady asks.

"No ma'am, I'm simply detaining you for both our protection. What's your name?" Lynch asks her.

"Nonya."

"What is it?" Lynch asks again, confused. I'm glad he does because I don't quite catch it either.

She bursts into laughter. "None ya... business." Lynch shakes his head while I fight my laughter. That was funny. We try hard to stay serious, but once in a while, someone gets us good.

"Dude, instead of enjoying a good laugh, see if you can find her ID." He tosses me her purse, not happy that she got a chuckle out of me, but I don't care. That shit was good.

"Ma'am, do you have anything in your pockets that could poke me or hurt me?"

"No, and you can't touch me. I didn't do anything, and you're no female." She laughs again.

"I can frisk you." He rolls his eyes and shakes his head like she's crazy. "I need to figure out if we need to get you medical attention."

"I'm not on anything." She starts to fight him, pissing Lynch off.

"Ma'am, please stay still." I practically beg her as I look through her purse for an ID while I keep an eye on my partner. I need to see if there are any warrants out on her.

His hands roam her back pocket. "Ma'am, what is in your shorts?"

"Nothing you perv." She looks over her shoulder at Lynch.

He presses his body against hers. "I'm not a perv ma'am. I'm a police officer. Your eyes are glazed over, and you're stumbling, which is a good indication that you're high on something. Tell me what you're on and if you have more of it, tucked away."

She shakes her head. "You just want to feel up my sexy body." She grinds her ass against his leg. "All you have to do is ask big boy, and I'll give you a piece." This right here is the purpose of the body cam. She went from rejecting him to wanting him, and when he rejects her, she'll get mad. We need to protect ourselves. This is also why we have female cops handle this stuff.

I pull her wallet out and discover a driver's license. As soon as I'm done calling it in, Lynch looks over his shoulder at me.

"He knows what I like." She giggles.

"Lady, I have no idea what you're talking about, but you need to be still." He looks at me. "Anything yet?" I shake my head.

"Stop resisting." Lynch presses her back against the car. "Stop being a dick," she growls.

"First, I know what you like. Now I'm a dick? I think we need to take you in so you can sober up." He yanks her off the car causing her to stumble, but he holds onto her, ensuring she doesn't fall.

When we get back to the precinct, Lynch pulls the woman from the backseat and drags her inside, tossing her in the can to sober up. "What's going on?" one of the guys asks us.

"Found her stumbling around on the streets. She's a mess and needs to sober up." Lynch explains.

Our Lieutenant hears our conversation and comes over. "Did she do anything illegal?"

"Nah, she's on something, but whatever it is, she's used it all. We couldn't find anything more on her." My eyes go wide because he says "we" as if I laid a hand on her.

"You frisked her?" the lieutenant asks.

"Yeah. She gave us permission. From her comments, I'm willing to bet she's a prostitute as well."

Fucking liar. I don't know what has gotten into my partner today, but I walk away. I want nothing to do with this right now. I have to figure out what to do because if I tell the truth, I become the precinct rat, and if I keep it to myself, he gets away with it.

"Summers." The lieutenant calls out. I turn around to see what he wants. "Do you have a different story?" I shake my head and take a seat to write it up. I'll let the bodycam tell the story. We have to write up every little thing we do mostly to protect our asses.

"Hey, you're tired, and I owe you. I got this one." Lynch pulls out the reports and begins writing it up.

"Thanks." He's right about me being tired, but I'm not sure how he feels he owes me one. He may change his mind when he realizes I recorded the stop.

I kick back and down a granola bar while I wait for him to do his damn job. When I'm done, I head to the locker room to hit the bathroom. On my way back, the woman we

brought in says, "When are you gonna let me out of here?" She rubs her fingers over her forehead as if fighting a headache.

She sounds a little better than she did not too long ago. "Soon. Relax a bit longer."

"You know what your partner did was wrong. He had no right frisking me." She leans her head against the bars. "I know my rights, and I'm reporting him." She giggles.

I cross my arms over my chest. "Is that so?" She nods with a shit eating grin on her face.

"I'll be back."

She bursts into laughter. "That's right, go tell your partner."

I ignore her and head to my lieutenant's office, knocking on the door. "Get in here."

I walk in, and soon as I close the door, he grins. "I was wondering how long it would take you to come to me."

"Sir, with all due respect, you have to know that if I don't tread lightly, I can quickly become the precinct rat, and that's not what I need right now. I have half the precinct up my ass already, and I'm so close to having what I need for SWAT. They don't take lightly to situations like mine."

"Not unless you were under direct orders by me to do what you did. Besides, I suspect he is into bigger shit than this, and that's why I'm not giving you another partner. Keep an eye on him."

My eyes go wide. This is not what I want either. I want nothing to do with Internal Affairs. This is their job. "Sir, what kind of bigger shit?"

"I can't go into details, just keep an eye on him. You have a body cam, use it."

I don't know what he is talking about. Lynch has a bit of a temper sometimes, but for the most part, he is a good cop.

"All due respect, sir, isn't that what Internal Affairs is for?"

"Yup, and they understand that you're cooperating and willing to help us out." My jaw drops. I didn't agree to shit. This was dumped on me. "I promise you will come out on top."

I shake my head. "How do you already know about the footage?"

He laughs. "Every time you two come in, I automatically check. He's playing nice with you. I can see that. You two are friends, but he disappears all the time. He leaves you to do all the paperwork. Where is he now?"

I crack my neck. "He offered to do the paperwork this time. Said he owed me for all the times I've done it."

"Sign it and bring it to me."

I need to chat with my boy. This is getting ugly, and I have no idea what to do about it. When I find Lynch, he looks up from his paperwork. "Dude, what did the lieutenant want?"

"He asked me for the paperwork on the lady. Are you done with it?" I nod toward the report.

He skims it over and signs in the appropriate spot before handing it to me. "Yup. It's all yours, you can sign it and deliver it."

I sign on the appropriate spot and deliver it to the lieutenant with Lynch by my side. He thanks us and says, "You two have a great night."

"Thanks, sir. You too." We both walk out of his office together.

I'm not sure what is going on, but I do not feel good about this. Lynch and I head to the locker room to change. When we're out of earshot of the lieutenant, I tell him that he made a dumb move today. "That woman is mad. You shouldn't have done that."

"I was just having a little fun." He bumps me with his shoulder.

I shake my head. "I'm not sure what has gotten into you today, but that's not how I roll, so the next time you want to

have a little fun. Leave me out."

I change my clothes, slam my locker shut, and leave without saying another word.

CHAPTER

TWENTY-THREE

JORDAN

I PULL up to Grant's place and hurry up the steps to his apartment. I've been on edge since I discovered someone got into my apartment and hate being out alone. I press the buzzer, and he instantly lets me in. Being behind a locked door makes me feel a little better, but I still hurry up the stairs to his place. My heart's pumping as if I ran a marathon. He greets me wearing nothing but a tight tank top and a pair of gym shorts. He looks incredibly sexy. I never thought feet were sexy until I met him. He's so perfect from head to toe.

"Hey, beautiful." He pulls me into his arms.

"Hey, handsome." I greet him in return. He gently kisses me and closes the door locking it behind us. "You look tired."

"I am. I had a rough day, but I feel much better now that you're here." He kisses me on the head.

"Glad I have the power to make you feel better." My stomach growls. "Well, apparently, I'm hungrier than I thought. It smells good. What are you making?"

"Nothing too fancy, pork chops, rice, and broccoli."

"Sounds good." I go to the fridge and pull out the bottle of white wine from the last time I was here. "Want some?"

"Nah, I'm good, baby, but help yourself."

He seems off tonight. "What's going on?" I ask, leaning on the counter as he puts the finishing touches on our dinner.

He hands me a plate. "Come on. We can talk over dinner." We both take a seat at the table. He's picking at his food, pushing it around on his plate, totally lost in thought.

"I thought we were going to talk."

"Sorry, it's work crap. Something went down with Lynch today and..." his words trail off. He stares down at the table. I can tell the wheels in his head are going a million miles an hour as he debates his next words. He exhales a deep breath. "Lynch is my boy, but he pulled some stuff today that wasn't cool." His eyes meet mine. "I guess what bothers me the most is that the higher-ups are aware of it and think he's in on something bigger. They want my help in figuring out exactly what that is."

"That certainly puts you in a tough place, doesn't it?"

He nods. "It does, like I said, he's my boy. Now I'm supposed to help them potentially ruin his career?" He shakes his head. "At this point, I'm not sure I have much choice. My lieutenant promises me I'll come out of this unscathed."

"Did he give you specifics?"

"No, and I'm trying to show that I'm a team player so I can make SWAT, but I don't need to be mixed up with Internal Affairs. There's not a cop on the force that likes them. Well, unless you're one of them."

"Listen, I don't know much about being a cop, and I could be wrong, but unless your lieutenant has given you reason not to, I would trust him. Maybe he's going to help you get on the SWAT team when all is said and done."

He nods. "I sure hope so because if not, I might as well become part of the internal affairs team. No one in that precinct will trust me after this is done." He finally starts to eat. Hopefully, he feels better now that he's talked about it. "We need to discuss what's going to happen when you start working nights." He drops his fork, done with his meal.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I'm a little concerned about you leaving the studio in the dark at night. Do you have a plan?"

I shake my head. "No, but it sounds like you do. Want to fill me in?" I collect our plates and take them to the sink,

rinsing them off and putting them into the dishwasher. I've always been a very independent woman. It's hard to have someone so concerned about me, and I'm not sure I'm ready to hear what he has to say. He's a cop. It's no doubt he has even more concern than most. I haven't even told my father about the break-in yet because I can't handle him freaking out on me either.

He comes up behind me and wraps his arms around me. He kisses me on the temple and then nips his way down to my neck. "I thought we had to talk?"

"We do. After." He shuts the water off and pulls me from the sink. "It's been a bad day, and right now, I want nothing more than to bury myself deep inside you."

"I think that can be arranged." I smile, happy to drop my concerns about his controlling nature for the time being.

He peels my shirt over my head and presses it against my back. His lips crash down on mine. The kiss is needy, his tongue dives in, searching for mine, as he moans into my mouth. Without breaking our kiss, he leads me to his room, where he deposits my shirt on the floor and pushes me down on the bed. His hands work with a frenzy to remove my shorts and panties. He finally has me down to my matching panty and bra set. He stops to stare at me, making me feel vulnerable. "You're so fucking beautiful, Jordan. There is no woman on this earth more gorgeous than you."

My cheeks blush, and I bite my lip as his eyes rake over my body. I can't believe how easily he can reduce me to a puddle. No man has ever made me feel this way. He crawls onto the bed like a predator after its prey. He takes a second to stare into my eyes. I want so badly to lift my head, connecting my lips with his, but I let him keep the control he loves. His head dips slightly, his nose rubbing gently over mine. He kisses it and then presses his lips to mine. My senses are on high alert. His spicy cinnamon scent overwhelms me, and his skin tastes heavenly, it's a mix that

has me reeling. His hands glide over my breasts, squeezing them just to the point of pain. It's amazing how he knows exactly when to stop.

He looks into my eyes as he sucks my bottom lip into his mouth before peppering kisses down my chest. He makes quick work of the clip at the front of my bra. A huge smile spreads across his face as he lowers himself to suck on my nipple. A moan escapes me, making me very happy he doesn't have any roommates. I'm quite vocal, but he's made comments that he likes it.

He kisses down my stomach until he reaches the top of my leggings. He grabs my hips lifting me off the bed, and pulls my leggings and panties down over my ass tossing them aside. Licking his lips, he crawls up between my legs to my small patch of hair. He inhales a deep breath. "Your scent is intoxicating." This man is talented with his tongue. He parts my folds, devouring me and working me to an almost instant orgasm. My hips are grinding with the rhythm of his tongue, but he grabs my legs behind my knees and pins them to my chest so I can no longer move. He moves down to my ass, and Lord have mercy, it is the most amazing feeling in the world. He curls two fingers deep inside me while he continues to lick and tease my ass. The feeling sends me over, my legs quiver as an orgasm races through my body. "Fuck, Grant."

Lifting both my legs over his shoulder, he leans forward and lines himself up. "Ask, and you shall receive. He slides the full length of his cock deep inside me and slowly starts pumping his hips. It's deep this way, and it gets deeper when he leans forward, pinning my legs against my chest. "Thank God, I'm flexible."

"For sure." He continues the pace he's set until he sends us over the edge together.

He collapses beside me, panting from his little workout. "I love you, Jordan." The words fall from his lips like he's said it a hundred times. My head whips around to meet his

gaze. I know from the sincerity in his eyes that he one hundred percent means it. A small smile plays at my lips. "I never believed in love at first sight until I met you. I swear I knew from the very second I met you at our unit. I tried to fight the feeling but finally caved when I spotted you on the floor. There's no fighting it, I'm in love with you."

"I love you too, Grant."

"Thank Jesus." He chuckles.

He pulls the blankets up over us when his AC kicks on. The vent is directly above the bed and chills us both. He lays there, drawing circles on my stomach, staring at me. "What's wrong, Grant?"

"I want to talk to you about the situation with the break-in."

"What about it?" I ask. He's already put screws in the window, so they can't open from the outside. We asked the landlord to add an extra lock to our door. I'm not sure what more we can do.

"Move in with me."

My eyes go wide. "What?" This completely throws me. He literally confessed to loving me mere minutes ago and now this. "Was that confession of love just to get what you want?"

"What? No! How could you think that?" I try to get up, but he pulls me closer. "Jordan, I've finally fallen in love with an amazing woman, she's been attacked, and her apartment has been broken into. What did you think I was going to do?" He rolls onto his side and runs his fingers through his wayward hair. He has that just fucked look and as mad as I am, it's quite sexy.

"I don't know what we're supposed to do, but this guy will not rule our lives or define us. This relationship needs to be at our pace. I feel like this nice dinner and lovemaking was to soften me up so you could ask me."

He sits up in bed. "What? Jordan, you know me better than that."

"Why didn't you say something while we were eating?" I'm getting loud, and it frustrates me more because I hate yelling. I exhale a slow breath trying to calm myself.

He gently lifts my chin forcing me to look him in the eye. "Baby, listen to me. I'm sorry it came across that way. I'm struggling here. I didn't know how to ask you. You're so strong and independent, and yes, I love that about you, but as a cop, it makes my instinct to protect you that much stronger."

I narrow my eyes. "So you don't love me? This is about your cop instinct to protect?" A part of me knows I'm not being fair, but my emotions are all over the place right now, and I'm not thinking clearly.

Not sure how much more of this I want to hear, I climb from the bed but don't get very far. He grabs my arm and pulls me back down. Climbing on top of me, he pins me to the bed and stares into my eyes. "Stop. I know this is a scary topic, but we have to face it. You're using your fears to make this about something it's not." His lips crash down on mine, and at first, I fight him refusing to let him use his powerful kiss to get through, but he doesn't give up. It takes about a second for my body to betray me and cave in. I can't win. My tongue meets his, and when he finally pulls away, I'm left panting.

"I don't like this fear I have inside of me. I've never feared anything, not living in the city, not living by myself. I've never feared being hurt because I was taught to protect myself and to watch my back. The second I got a little too comfortable, someone came into my apartment, and we discovered that I have a stalker watching me. I don't know how to deal with this." I shake my head. "Oh, and let's add falling in love to the mix of feelings fucking with my brain." I run my fingers through my just fucked hair.

He slips back down beside me. "Let me help you through this. Together we can make it work."

"I need to think about it. I'm sorry. I have never been and never will be someone who makes rash decisions. I weigh them out, and when I'm positive, it's what I want, then I deal with it."

He nods his agreement, but his eyes plead with me to say yes. "I understand."

We each have our own set of fears, and they're not too different, but we have to work through them. I fear not just this stalker who is now watching me, but I fear losing my independence. He fears losing me to the stalker if he can't be there to protect me. Even if I move in here, he won't be able to protect me every minute of the day. He still has to go to work, as do I, and my schedule is about to change.

He presses his lips to mine this time gentler than the last. "I love you, Jordan Smith. You are mine, and nothing can change that."

A small smile plays at my lips. "I love you too, Grant Summers."

CHAPTER

TWENTY-FOUR

GRANT

AFTER TWO WEEKS of missing dinner with Gram, we're heading over to hang out with her. I'm waiting for Jordan to get here from work, which is not good for my racing thoughts.

I've tried so hard not to bring back up our conversation from the other night, but it's been weighing on my mind. I'm not sure how long she might need to think about it, but I'll only be able to go so long before I bring it up again. I'd much rather her be living with me before she has to start working nights. That way, it's easier for me to pick her up from work. I roll my eyes at my own thoughts. *Like she'll ever allow that.*

As I pace my living room, my phone pings. I quickly tug it from my pocket to see if it's Jordan, but it's not.

I've given you more than enough time to end it with her. Now I will end it for you.

"Fuck." The buzzer rings as I'm staring at a text from her stalker. I know it's her, so I press the button to let her in and tug my phone back into my pocket. As soon as she gets up to my place, she kisses me softly and asks, "Do I have time for a quick shower?"

I smile. "Of course, baby." She hurries off to the bathroom, leaving me pacing the living room, rubbing my fingers over the keys I have for her in my pocket.

In a matter of minutes, she comes running from the bathroom with her hair damp but dressed and ready to go. "Okay, let's go see Gram."

"One second, baby." She stops and turns. "I know you haven't made up your mind yet, and this isn't meant to rush you, but I want you to have this." I hand her the small ring with two keys on it. "This one is for downstairs, and this one is for my apartment. No more ringing the buzzer." She looks unsure for a moment. "I love you."

A small smile plays at her beautiful lips. "Thanks. I love you, too."

When we get down to my car, I notice hers isn't in the general area. "Where's your car?" I ask while still scanning the street.

"Up the street, there were no open spots when I got here." She points in the direction of her car.

"Okay. If there's a spot when we get back, I'll move it."

"No need. I need to sleep at home tonight."

"Why?" I want to yell and scream at her, but I resist. I swear this woman is trying to kill me. "I thought you were spending the night?"

"I have things I need to get done, and I'm spending Saturday night at your place after we play pool."

"Okay," I concede, internally shaking my head. I'm caving too easily these days. I need to demand my balls back.

We finally pull up to Gram's with enough bags of food to feed an army. It's a good thing because when we get upstairs, we discover her friend, Mr. Frazier is over and she has asked him to join us for dinner.

Jordan looks at me with a slight grin. She sees it too. "How was your day, Gram?" she asks as I grab plates.

"It was lovely, dear. Mr. Frazier and I have been sitting here, chatting for hours about anything and everything. He taught me how to play gin, and he made us lunch." She's absolutely glowing, and it's nice to see.

"That sounds nice," Jordan encourages her with a huge smile on her face.

"It is. It gets lonely sitting here by myself all day, and it's not like you two can constantly be around. Plus, it's great being with someone my own age." She winks at Jordan.

"I agree," Mr. Frazier says. "My grandson is around all day, and it still feels like I'm alone. He sits on that dang game all day, playing and yelling through a headset." He shakes his head. "He leaves for short periods of time, and as soon as he gets back, he's right back on that game thing." He huffs. "It's nice to be around someone who actually speaks to me." Mr. Frazier is a tall, thin man with a head full of salt and pepper hair.

"No offense, but it sounds like someone needs to teach him some manners." I shake my head. I would never do that to my grandmother. Then again, I know what it's like to have an appreciation for what you have, no matter how little.

"None taken. He's always been a spoiled child, and it only got worse when his parents were killed in a car crash. He was already out of the house and old enough to support himself, but he took it hard. Broke up with his girlfriend, distancing himself from his friends, and started losing himself in those games." He stares down at his food with a frown.

"I'm sure with some support, he'll come around," Jordan tries to encourage him.

Mr. Frazier shakes his head. "I don't know. I think he's too far gone. He's not working anymore. I know I'm only enabling him, but he's my grandson and my last living blood relative. What am I supposed to do, kick him out?" The poor guy looks so sad. I feel bad for him. I get how it feels to have only one relative left, that's Gram for me.

"No one can make that decision but you," Gram tells him. "You have to live with the choices you make for the rest of your life." Gram shakes her head. "As someone who

has walked away from their child, I totally understand how hard it can be.” Gram squeezes his arm in silent, gentle support. “Please know, I won’t judge you. No matter what you decide.”

He smiles at her caringly. “Thank you.”

The room becomes silent as we eat our dinner. This wasn’t the lighthearted, comedy night we usually have, but I’m glad we’re here. It gives me a chance to spend time with Gram’s friend. I was nervous about her hanging out with him, but he seems to be a nice guy. He seems very genuine, and it’s apparent they enjoy one another’s company. I almost feel bad we showed up and interrupted their time, but it’s good we did. They both need to eat, and from their tiny bodies, it seems neither of them eats enough.

When we’re done, Gram announces it’s time to move to the living room to watch a movie, and the glow in her eyes makes me smile. “Sure, Gram. Jordan and I will clean up, why don’t you two go pick one.”

When Mr. Frazier and Gram are settled, Jordan looks at me. “They’re cute together.” She whispers.

I nod. “They are. I hope he’s as genuine as he appears.”

She gives me a cocky grin. “Are you going to start hovering over Gram to protect her too?”

My brows furrow and I turn away. Is that what she thinks I’m doing? Hovering over her? Why can’t she see I love her, and I want to be sure she’s safe? *Because you fucked it up, you fool.*

“Grant.” She calls my name, but I ignore her and take a seat in the living room. I’m hurt, and that’s something I haven’t felt in a long time. I don’t typically let people close to me, and this is why.

When she joins us, she looks at me with puppy dog eyes begging for forgiveness. She mouths, “I’m sorry.” I take her hand and continue watching Fluffy, one of our favorite

comedians. This is not a conversation I want to have in front of Gram and Mr. Frazier.

We're all sitting around quoting Fluffy and laughing hysterically when there's a knock at the door.

"It's probably my grandson. I'll get it." Mr. Frazier jumps up from the couch. He moves pretty well for someone in his mid-seventies.

He opens the door with a defensive stance blocking the view into Gram's apartment. It's hard to hear their conversation over the TV and Grams laughter, but it sounds like Mr. Frazier's grandson is upset. I know I'm eavesdropping, but I can't help it. This is my grandmother's apartment, and I need to know she is safe. *Of course, you do. You have a safety complex, as Jordan pointed out.*

"What's wrong?" she asks, realizing I'm not watching the show, but I shake my head.

We hear yelling from the hallway. Jordan's eyes go wide. She turns to me. "Do you hear how he's talking to him?" I nod, not sure what to say.

"You need to come back to the apartment!" the kid yells at his grandfather. "You need to eat, and you've been down here all day," he growls.

"I already ate. Now go back upstairs, and I'll be up soon," Mr. Frazier assures him.

"So, I cooked for nothing?" the kid shouts with frustration.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know you were going to cook tonight. You never do," Mr. Frazier explains to him.

Jordan jumps up from the couch. "What are you doing?"

"Teaching this boy some manners." She starts toward the door, but I grab her hand to stop her.

"Jordan, stay out of it," I warn.

"He is so mean to that man," Gram tells her.

She pulls her hand from mine and storms toward the door, but as she gets there the grandson is leaving. I see her brows furrow, and her eyes narrow. "Jordan?"

She closes her eyes and shakes her head. "It's nothing. He's gone." She puts her hand on Mr. Frazier's shoulder. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, but now I feel bad. He finally did something positive, and I wasn't there for him." The poor man is on the verge of tears.

"You had no way of knowing. You can't beat yourself up for that." Jordan walks him back to the couch.

"Yeah, what are you supposed to do, sit home waiting for him to do something good?" Gram tells him.

He shrugs. "I don't know what I'm supposed to do anymore. No matter what I do, I feel like it's always wrong."

Jordan and I both look at each other with the same look of sadness in our eyes. This poor man has no family except for his grandson, who doesn't know how to pull his life together, and it's breaking Mr. Frazier's heart.

"You can only do so much, and I know it's hard. We've talked about this, and we can talk about it more again tomorrow, but please don't keep it in. One of the things that helped me through my situation with my daughter was having supportive friends to discuss it with."

Mr. Frazier nods. "Thank you so much, Penelope. I don't know what I would do without you to talk to."

"Thank him for making you dinner and explain that had you known he was doing it, you would have come home. Maybe he'll understand." He nods and then looks to the sky swallowing hard, fighting the tears welling in his eyes.

"Gram, it sounds like you two need some private time, and we need to head out. If either of you needs anything, give us a call." Gram thanks me as I lean over and kiss her on the cheek. Jordan and I both shake hands with Mr. Frazier, and we leave them to their conversation.

When we get down to the car, Jordan looks at me, shaking her head. "That poor man."

"Yeah."

"You know, I believe people are brought together for a reason. That man was brought into your grandmother's life because he needed her. He needs someone to listen to him, someone who understands what he's going through and can help him deal with it." I stare at her with my brows raised, but I stay silent.

"What?" she asks as I cross my arms over my chest and continue to stare. "If you don't speak, so help me, God."

"You mean like us?" Her eyes scan the car. She can't even look at me as she seems to consider my words. "Jordan, look at me." When her eyes finally meet mine, I add, "I need you as much as you need me. There's nothing wrong with that. It doesn't mean you'll be any less independent than you are now. I get what you're going through. You have to let me help you."

She nods but slowly lowers herself into my car. By the time I get in, I feel like she's a million miles away. She's staring down at her lap as she twists the ring her father gave her and bites her luscious bottom lip. She's clearly thinking over what I said, but we can't sit out here all night, so I sigh and pull away from my grandmother's house, bringing us straight to my place. I pull up alongside her car and get out to open her door.

She climbs out and looks me in the eye. "You gave me something to think about," she admits with sincerity.

"I could tell." I lean down, gliding my hand along her jawline, tilting her head slightly. I kiss her ever so gently and then whisper, "I love you, Jordan. Please don't ever doubt that again."

A small smile tugs at her lips. "I won't, I promise." She presses up on her toes to kiss me one last time. "I love you too." I squeeze her tight and then usher her into her car.

"Call me as soon as you get home, please."

She looks up at me with a smile making me feel better than I did a few moments ago.

"I will, I promise. Good night Grant."

“Good night, baby.” I close her car door and watch her drive off silently, praying she makes it home okay.

CHAPTER

TWENTY-FIVE

JORDAN

“BABY, are you almost ready to go?” Grant sticks his head in the door of the bathroom. We’re heading out for some fun with our friends.

“I’ll be ready in a minute.”

“Okay.” He leaves me to finish my makeup.

I’ve spent the last two days thinking about our conversation about me moving in with him. I love him. I know I do, but damn, I want to move in with him because the timing is right for us not because we’re afraid of some wacko who has decided he needs to fuck with my life. I think that’s the real problem I have with this—the reason behind the decision, not the decision itself.

My phone rings, pulling me from my thoughts. I rush out of the bathroom, crashing into Grant, who is trying to get me my phone at the same time. We both laugh, and I quickly answer it. “Hello?”

“Hey, girl.”

“What’s up, Peaches?” I’m so excited to hear from my friend. We haven’t spoken over the phone in weeks. She was hoping to get transferred to Boston but was supposed to let me know if it happened. When I didn’t hear from her, I thought it was a no go.

“Why do you sound out of breath?”

I chuckle. “I’m getting ready to go out with my boyfriend and our friends, and I was running for the phone.”

“Well, get ready to add one more friend to the mix because I’m coming to Boston.”

“That’s awesome. When do you get here?”

"Three weeks. I have to pack up my apartment and figure out what to keep and what to get rid of. Plus, find a place to stay." A huge grin spreads across my face.

"Don't stress about a place yet. I might have something for you. Let me call you back."

"Okay."

I cut the call and tell Grant I'm ready to go. He gives me a leery look knowing I'm up to no good, but I'm not spilling anything just yet.

When we pull up to the pool hall, Cory drives up with her friend Callie in her car. I'm not sure if anyone is here yet, but we have two tables reserved tonight because of the number of people coming. It should make for an interesting night. Grant, Cory, Callie, and I go to the window to check-in. They give us two tables in the corner. He tells us that Cindy is our server tonight and that she'll be right over to get our drink order.

"What did Peaches want?" Grant asks while we're waiting for the others.

"To tell me she is moving to Boston."

"Oh, that's cool." He puts his arm around me.

"Who's Peaches?" Cory asks, and I fill her and Callie in on how I met her at boot camp and how close we became.

"You'll get to meet her when she gets here. She's the only one I kept in touch with after boot camp, and I'm pumped that she's going to live here. She's cool and will fit right in with our group."

"Cool," Cory says.

Kendra and Jodi come walking in, but Kendra doesn't have the cheerful look she typically does.

"Hey girl, where's Kasen?" I ask, wrapping her in a hug.

"He's a dick, so I told him to stay home." She walks away, mumbling something about him not ruining her night.

I look at Jodi with my eyes wide. "He must be a dick often," she grumbles. Kasen hasn't come out with us in forever. I think it was probably a bad idea for them to move

in together so quickly. Another reason sitting in the back of my mind as to why I shouldn't move in with Grant, but I push it away because Grant and I are not them, and I can't compare our relationships.

Everyone is here and ready to have some fun. We are dividing up teams when Sloan arrives. He appears to be in a good mood tonight. He walks straight over to Grant and shakes his hand. "How's it going?" Sloan asks.

"Good, how are you?" Grant asks him.

"I'm good. Thanks for inviting me to hang out," he states, looking down at the floor. His confidence has gone down the drain since he's started using. He tries to convince everyone that he's clean, but we all know differently.

"No thanks needed, man."

I can see the leery look on Grayson and Levi's faces as he walks away. Grant discreetly fills them in as he approaches me and wraps me in a hug. We make the remaining necessary intros and then get started.

To make the night more fun, we decided to mix mine and Cory's friends with his and rotate tables. I'm playing with Levi, Grant, Tori, Kendra, and Julia. Then on the other table is Jodi, Cory, Callie, Wyatt, Jayla, and Grayson. Lynch, Mary, and Sloan will rotate in the next round.

The drinks arrive on two huge trays as we start our first game. Levi's being all cocky and demands he breaks for us but fucks it up. "Nice job, superman," I bust his chops.

"Oh, you think you have skills?" he asks.

"I do, and when it gets to my turn, I'll school you." I lean against my man, who puts his arm around my waist.

"You're killing me. You look and smell so sexy." He leans down and whispers in my ear.

"I'm glad I turn you on but do me a favor."

"Anything, baby."

"Let's win the game, and then we can talk dirty to each other." He bursts into laughter. He knows damn well I'm competitive and have no desire to lose.

He throws his head back. "What am I going to do with you?"

"Love me."

"You better believe it." He bites my neck playfully.

I catch a glimpse of Sloan watching us from the other table. I feel a little bad that we're flirting in front of him, knowing how he feels, but he has to learn to deal with it. We shouldn't have to change who we are.

"Okay, Miss Thang. Show us what you got," Levi throws at me. Like he's made me nervous. I walk the table, trying to figure out which solid I want to hit. I lean over, take my shot, and sink the ball. "Easy shot," he says, talking shit.

"You do realize we're on the same team." I look at him like he's crazy.

"Baby, he can't help it. He's competitive by nature, but he has nothing on Grayson. Be glad he's on the other table."

Sloan comes over to our table. "Dude, I wouldn't talk trash, my girl has skills."

"Thank you, Sloan." I smile, happy to have my friend back. He stands beside me as Grant takes his shot.

Grayson hears him and shouts out. "We're switching this up after a game or two."

Jodi steps up to Grayson and pokes him in the chest. "And what's wrong with the team you have now?"

Grayson stumbles over his words. "Nothing, just I want a game with Jordan and Grant."

"Here, dude, let me dig your balls out of my pocket," Grant throws back at him, making everyone burst out laughing.

He whispers in my ear. "I've never seen my boy stumble over his words like that."

I look up at him. "She's single." I wiggle my brows.

"He broke up with his girl a couple of weeks back." He fills me in with a smile.

"How come?"

"He caught her fucking some other dude."

I shake my head. "That's so fucked up."

"Hey, lover boy. It's your turn," Levi busts Grants balls.

Grant grabs his pool stick. "We'll talk more later." He kisses me on the nose and takes his shot.

Levi, Grant, and I win the first game, and as we're watching the other table finish, Cindy comes over with the appetizers we ordered. I take advantage of the timing and decide to pull Cory aside for a quick conversation.

"Cory." I nod my head off to the side so no one can hear us.

As we're talking, I glance over to our group. Grant and I lock in on each other because we're that connected. He can always sense where I'm at, and instantly we find one another. He winks at me but gives us our privacy, and I'm glad. "Listen, Peaches is moving to town and needs a place to live," I whisper, not wanting anyone to hear until I know she's okay with her staying at the apartment. "Grant wants me to move in with him. He's nervous with all that is going on with my stalker and wants to keep a closer eye on me. And, to be honest, I feel it'd be safer for you as well..."

"So you move in with Grant, Peaches takes your room, and I still have a roommate."

"Exactly."

"Girl, I'm totally down with all of that. Thank you so much for considering how it would make me feel." She wraps me in a hug, and we both walk back over to our crew, where Grayson is trying to redo the teams, deciding that he, Grant, and I would make an unstoppable team. His words, not mine.

"I want in on this team," Sloan announces.

"Okay, we play four on four," Grayson agrees.

"I want in on that team, too," Jodi announces.

"Sorry, girl, I jumped first," Sloan laughs.

"Then I guess you'll have to play against me," Jodi tells him, planting her hands on her hips.

"Fine. Who are you playing with?" Grayson calls out.

Jodi grins, "Me, Cory, Levi and..." she scans the room.

"Callie has skills," Cory tells her.

"Okay, Callie," Jodi calls her over.

Everyone else forms teams and plays on the other table.

This table is full of competitive people. This could get ugly quick.

"I'm breaking," I call out, picking up my pool stick and approaching the table.

"Ha, your girl thinks she can do better than me," Levi cackles.

"Bet she can," Sloan comes to my defense.

I flip Levi off, lean over the table, and turn on all my focus. I slam the stick into the cue ball, scattering the rest of the balls and sinking two solids. With the cockiest look I can muster, I look at Levi and announce, "Solids it is."

"Pshhh, whatever."

"Dude, my girlfriend did way better than you. As a matter of fact, I don't think you're allowed to break ever again." Everyone bursts into laughter.

"Fuck you. That was a lucky shot."

I plant my hand on my hip. "I'll break the next game and the game after that. I promise you I'll always outbreak you." The heat is rising at our table, but it's all in good fun. Even Sloan appears to be having a good time. I've missed this side of him. I'm glad he's back.

Everyone is having fun busting Levi's balls for trying to talk shit to me, and it's making for a fun evening. He's a good sport and takes it well.

Grayson was right. We make an unstoppable foursome. We killed Levi and his team. Of course, to hear him tell it, it had nothing to do with the shot that he missed. Levi is the type of person who places the blame on his team, but Jodi's not hearing it. She boots him off their team and grabs Jayla to play the next round with them.

"I'm determined to find us a team that can compete with you four," she says.

"Can I get y'all another round of drinks?" Cindy asks.

"I'm gonna bounce. I have to work in the morning," Sloan announces. He wraps me in a hug and shakes hands with the guys.

I order my drink as everyone else agrees that this will be the last round. "I'll be right back," I tell Grant and walk Sloan to the door.

"Listen, I hope hanging with us wasn't too awkward for you. It was nice to have my friend back."

He smiles down at me. "It sucks to see you with another guy, but that's my problem, not yours. I've missed you, and it was good to hang out." I smile. "I'll see you around."

He hugs me one last time and walks out the door. I jog back over to our table, finally feeling better about my friendship with Sloan.

"Everything okay?" Grant asks.

"Yeah, I wanted him to know that I was glad to have my friend back." I shrug. "It had to be hard watching us flirt."

Grant scrunches his face. "Sorry, I wasn't thinking about that."

"It's all good. He admits that it's his problem and that we shouldn't have to stress over it. I think in time, all will be good."

"I'm glad." He puts his arm around me.

We're taking so long to play because we're talking and having fun. The time is flying by, and it's getting late.

"Hey, Levi. Watch this." I break again and start us out with one ball sunk again. He flips me off from the other table but then winks to let me know he's playing.

It's taken a bit longer to finish this game because we've been drinking, and we're all getting tired. It's come down to the eight ball, and each team has tried to sink it once and failed. I'm sure the alcohol is not helping our aim any. It's my shot at the ball, and I want the game to be over. I take

my time walking the table, trying to decide which pocket to go for. I have two options, and I decide on the corner pocket. I call my shot, lean over the table, and sink it.

"Nice shot," Levi says.

"Thanks, Levi." He gives me a high five.

The guys squared away our tab while we were finishing the game, so we all put our sticks away and headed out. Grayson and Levi escort the ladies to their cars. They're only a few spots down from us. Grant and I head straight to mine, and when we get out there, we find another picture on the windshield of the car. This one is bigger, like something a private investigator would use to show evidence.

Grant is seething. "Fuck," He shouts, grabbing Lynch, Grayson, and Levi's attention. They all come running over to see what's going on. Their eyes go wide when they see the picture of Grant and me. This time with X's drawn over Grant's eyes. My nerves take over, and I instantly start twisting the ring my father gave me.

"Dude, that's a threat against a cop," Levi reminds him.

"And I know who did it." Grant growls snagging the picture and storms back into the pool hall with me, Mary, Lynch, Grayson, and Levi following behind him. He scans the pool hall looking to see if he spots a face in the crowd.

"Who are you looking for?"

"Sloan."

"He left." I remind him, confused. "You think he left this on the car when he took off for the night?"

Grant shrugs. "I don't know, but since I don't see anyone that matches the description that you gave us, and he's the only other guy who would have a grudge against me, who else could it be?"

Levi puts his hand on Grant's shoulder. "Come on, man. If her stalker left it, he's not going to hang around to be caught. Besides, anyone could have left it. Let's go."

"You're right, but my gut tells me Sloan has something to do with everything that's been happening." We all walk back out to my car.

"So much for feeling better about our friendship," I grumble. Now I'm starting to second guess Sloan's motives. Is he trying to get close to me so he can hurt Grant? He wouldn't do that. It wouldn't bring us closer. It would tear us apart. I would never forgive him. He has to know that.

"I'm sorry, baby, but my gut tells me he's behind this. I just don't have the proof."

"You know the saying. Keep your friends close and your enemies closer," Levi tells him.

"Please don't say anything to him about this." He looks at me. He doesn't need to know he is a suspect."

"If he is the one doing this, he'll screw up eventually," Levi adds.

Levi is right. We need to pretend like this didn't happen. We need to keep treating Sloan as if he is a friend. I know Grant has his gut feeling, but I can't wrap my head around him being my stalker, so it's best to drop it.

The entire ride back to Grant's apartment is tense. I can feel the tension radiating from his tight body. He's on edge, freaking out over this new picture. I know what I have to do, and I'll do it as soon as we get back. Right now, he needs to focus on driving. We've yet to face the worst part, which is telling my father at dinner tomorrow night. I'm not sure how he's going to handle any of this.

When we get back to his place, he paces the living room running his fingers through his hair. A habit I've noticed he has when something is worrying him, or he's mulling things over. "Grant." He keeps going. His mind is clearly racing a million miles an hour. "Grant," I call him again, a little louder this time, and he finally stops.

"Jordan, please don't make me beg." His eyes are already pleading with me.

"I won't."

"You don't understand. I need to..." his words trail. "What did you say?" He stares into my eyes, hoping and praying I said what he thinks I said.

"I won't. I'm going to move in with you. Peaches is going to take my room and be Cory's roommate. It works out perfectly. It was never a question about wanting to live with you. I want to spend all my time with you. I simply didn't want this guy dictating the terms or the speed of our relationship, and I needed to be sure the time was right. Not to mention I didn't want to leave Cory high and dry, but now Peaches will be her roommate, so it all works out."

"Thank fuck." A huge smile lights up his face. He wraps me in a huge hug, lifting me off the ground, and spinning me around. "Thank you so much." He kisses me hard.

It's amazing how a few simple words have taken him from freaking out to calm. I guess he truly feels he can keep me safe if I'm here, and that's what's important. With his job, I don't need him freaking out and worrying about me. He needs to keep his head in the game. He's getting close to having enough time in service on the force for SWAT, and I don't want him screwing that up.

"You're welcome. I need to call Peaches before we head to my parents' house tomorrow and let her know so she can plan. You have plenty of furniture, so they can keep what I have. It's a win-win for everyone."

"It's time to celebrate." He pulls me even closer.

"Oh yeah, what did you have in mind?" I wiggle my brows.

He looks up at the ceiling like he's thinking about it. "I think I'll devour that pretty pussy of yours until you can't take it anymore and then bury my cock deep inside you until the sun comes up. How does that sound?"

I throw my head back. "God, I love the way you think."

"Me too." He plants a chaste kiss on my lips and pulls me to our bedroom to end our night with a bang.

CHAPTER

TWENTY-SIX

JORDAN

“WHEN THE HELL were you going to tell me that someone got into your apartment?” my father’s voice booms through the phone.

“Hi, Daddy. How are you?”

“Don’t play coy with me, young lady. Do you know how stupid I looked when a police lieutenant came up to me to apologize that they didn’t have enough of a print for identification, and I have no idea what the fuck he’s talking about.”

I exhale a deep breath. “Daddy, Grant and I were going to talk to you about it tonight. I’m trying to get ready, so we can come over. You can yell at me when we get there.”

Grant’s eyes are practically popping out of his head, hearing my father scream through the phone like that. He mouths to me, “I’m not going,” and I start to giggle.

“This is not funny.” My father growls even louder.

“Daddy, I know it’s not.” I slump down onto the chair. “I’m not laughing at you.”

“Get over here,” he demands.

“See you soon, Daddy.” I sweeten my voice before I say, “I love you.”

He sighs. “I love you too. Now hurry over, please. I expect all the details when you get here.”

I cut the call, not saying another word to him. He’s heated, and I’m lucky I know how to calm him down when he gets like that. I’ve always been a daddy’s girl, and that will prove helpful today.

“Your father is going to kill me, isn’t he?”

I laugh. "Nah. He doesn't blame you. He's just very overprotective, but we need to fill him in and then keep him in the loop going forward." My father has said it before, and I bet he's thinking it now. These are the times he wishes he was a cop instead of a firefighter. He'd have access to a lot more information. My father has always been one of those dads that would bust his ass to give his girls what they need, and he would die to protect us. He is such a selfless man, and I love him dearly.

He chuckles. "Yeah, let's hope he's not carrying his Glock when we get there."

I toss my head back, laughing. "He adores you." I kiss him on the cheek. "I need to call Peaches, and then we can go."

I hit her speed dial number and wait patiently for her to answer. "What's up, boo?" she answers, sounding like her cheerful self.

"Listen, I have a place for you to stay, and it comes fully furnished. All you have to do is get your ass and your clothes here."

"What? That's crazy! How?"

"I'm moving in with Grant, and seeing how his place is fully furnished, I'm taking very little of my stuff. Plus, you'd be kind of helping me out too because I have a new roommate. She's cool, and I don't want to leave her hanging with no one to help her with the apartment."

She claps her hands and squeals into the phone. "You are the best."

"Feeling is mutual."

"I'll text you with my exact date of arrival. It's going to be a long drive up the coast by myself, but my company is putting me up in a hotel overnight, so I can do it in two days." Peaches currently lives in Georgia, which is how she got her nickname.

"Let me know if there's anything we can do to help. I'll be moving out sooner rather than later, so it'll be all yours

when you arrive.”

“Sounds good. Thanks, boo.”

“I gotchu.” I chuckle. “I gotta run. I’m having dinner with my parents, but I’ll talk to you soon.”

“No problem. I’ll see you soon.”

We leave as soon as I end the call. I know my father is on edge, and I don’t want to make him wait any longer than necessary.

My mother is calmly knitting on the couch as my father is pacing the family room with his fingers running through his hair when we walk through the door. “Daddy, please calm down. You’re going to give yourself a heart attack.”

His eyes meet mine, and he instantly wraps me in a hug. As Grant expected, he is wearing his forty-five on his waist as he usually does when he’s on high alert. Thankfully he’s never had to shoot anyone, but it has come in handy. Most times, revealing it will scare people enough.

“I’m fine,” I whisper to him.

He grabs my shoulders and looks down at me. “I’m so thankful you are. Please tell me what happened.”

I go through all the details of what happened when I got home from my annual training, ensuring I leave nothing out. I’ve never hidden anything from my father, and I don’t want him to think I am doing so now. “Please understand, Dad. I didn’t mean for you to think I was keeping something from you, but we had no info, and I didn’t want to worry you.”

Grant jumps in. “I didn’t even know that forensics had gotten back to us on the print until you called. I originally thought Sloan was involved and, although he’s not a match for the print, my gut won’t let go of that. However, I don’t think he’s alone in this.”

“Why?”

Grant pulls the latest picture out and hands it to my father. “I’m willing to bet there are no prints on it. I’m sure the partial on the last one was a slip up that he won’t let

happen again. Sloan was at the pool hall with us last night. He didn't seem to have any issues with Jordan and I dating, and when Jordan walked him to the door, he seemed cool about it. Like he had gotten over her."

"Either he is a good actor, or it's not him," my father says.

"A while back, my partner and I visited Sloan's store to discuss the case with him. He told us he overheard some guys discussing a break-in but wouldn't let them leave his sight to call it in because he feared they would steal stuff and leave the store." Grant shakes his head. "None of that makes sense to me, but he is Jordan's friend, so I'm not sure what to think."

"I've known Sloan for a long time. I'm not sure what to think either. He was always a good kid." My father shakes his head. "God help him if he is involved in this."

"Daddy, remember, we have no proof it's him."

He nods. "What's your next step?"

"I'm moving in with Grant," I announce like it's no big deal, but in reality, I have no idea how my parents are going to react to that.

My father mulls it over for a second. "Good, but where does that leave Cory?"

"I love that you worry about everyone, Dad. I took care of her too. Do you remember my friend Peaches from boot camp?"

"How can I not, you sent a million pictures of the two of you." I laugh. We did take a lot of pictures. "What about her?"

"The company she works for is transferring her here to Boston, and she needs a place to stay. I told her she could have my room."

"Do you trust her?"

I shrug. "She was my battle buddy for nine weeks. The woman ran up lanes with me carrying an M4." I look down

for a second. "We helped each other get through boot camp. I have no reason not to trust her."

My father nods. He knows from being a firefighter, you have to learn to trust quickly. You go all in having each other's backs, and that's exactly how Peaches and I were. "All in," he says with a smile.

"All in," I repeat.

My sister comes storming through the door, slamming it shut behind her. "What's going on?" She picks up on the intense situation happening right now. "Someone got into your sister's apartment while she was away."

"That's crazy. Is Cory, all right?"

I nod. "She's fine. She thought I left the window open. She had no idea what had happened until I got home, and she mentioned it to me." My mom is sitting beside me, crocheting a million miles a minute, something she's always done when she was nervous about my father responding to fires. She used to tell us the counting and focusing calmed her nerves, but it doesn't seem to be doing anything for her tonight.

"I can't believe someone was actually in your place," my sister reiterates, upsetting my mother more.

"The question is, who was it? They didn't take anything, leaving out the possibility of it being a junkie." I shake my head. "After our night with Sloan, I don't believe it's him."

"I guess that leaves the guy from the break-in." My mother says, never taking her eyes off her project.

"If that's the case, then why me? And why is he driving us all crazy with these little notes and pictures?"

"He probably knew to lay low for a while. Sometimes we don't give these guys enough credit. He's most likely a loner, someone who has time to sit and think things through."

"Is this going to be the topic of conversation all night long?" my sister says with disgust.

How can this woman go from concerned to dismissive at the drop of a hat? I don't get her at all. If our positions were reversed, I would be totally freaked out and worried about her.

"No, it won't be. I can see it's upsetting your mother," my father says as the oven beeps and my mother excuses herself. "Keep me in the loop on this, Grant."

"Will do, sir." Grant responds in a respectful manner. "I'm going to check into the photo itself. See if there's a way to narrow something down from the quality. Especially since this one is so blown up."

"Good." My father says before looking at me. "You watch your back."

I stand up, salute my father and shout, "Sir, yes, sir!" I'm trying to lighten the mood, and it only slightly works.

He chuckles and shakes his head. "Not funny, Jordan." I shrug and laugh.

My sister, on the other hand, rolls her eyes and storms off to the kitchen. Grant looks at me and says, "Bipolar, much?"

"Who the fuck knows?"

"Language." My mother says from the entrance to the living room.

"Sorry, Mom." I scrunch my face. I didn't want her to hear that.

"Dinner is ready," she informs us.

As usual, my mom has outdone herself. She has prepared one of my favorite meals—boiled dinner. I can't even imagine how some people don't know what this is. It's the most amazing mix of ham, cabbage, carrots, potatoes, and onions all boiled together in one large pot. It makes my mouth water as I put a huge dollop of butter on top and watch it melt.

"I've heard of this but never actually had it. It smells wonderful." Grant stares down at his plate full of food.

"It tastes even better," I tell him with a huge smile. This is the one meal I always cut up and mix together in one big pile. Grant watches me through the process. I can see the uncertainty on his face, so I scoop up a fork full and feed it to him.

He closes his eyes and slowly chews. A small moan escapes him making me want to go home, but dinner has only just begun. "That is heaven," he finally says, cutting up his food and adding butter to it as I did. "Please tell me what to buy and how to make this."

My mom chuckles. "It's easy. I'll write it down for you before you leave tonight."

"Thank you so much, ma'am."

She glares at him. "I've asked you before to stop calling me ma'am. It's Val or Valerie," she warns him yet again.

He nods, still eating. "I'm sorry, Valerie."

She nods. "That's better."

He wipes his mouth. "Please let us take some home. This is so good."

I'm thrilled he likes it because it's seriously one of my favorite meals ever, and now I can get him to make it for me. "If we start eating this too often, we're going to need extra trips to the gym. It's good because it's full of fat, and we just added butter to it," I inform my sexy, muscular man.

He rolls his eyes. "Are you trying to pop my bubble?"

"Nope, I love this as much, if not more than you, but I don't want you thinking it's healthy because it has cabbage and carrots in it."

"It's always the unhealthy stuff that tastes the best." He rolls his eyes.

"SWAT don't want no fat boy on their team." I pat his belly.

He drops his fork onto his now almost empty plate and pushes it away. "Thanks, baby." He sits back with a sigh.

"Anytime." I giggle and finish my dinner. "You're not the only one that has to be careful. We have a holiday show in

about four months. I can't go on stage if I don't fit in my costume."

It's quite amusing how frustrated my sister is getting with our dinner time flirting. At one point in my life, I cared if I was upsetting her, but the older I get, the less I care. It seems no matter what I do, she's always mad about something. I can never do anything right by her, and yet I was the one who always struggled to be at her level. In high school, she always had better grades than me, she had more friends than me, and she was always picked for the sports team.

I danced because it was the only thing I was good at and I grew to love it. Plus, I didn't have to worry about being picked for a team. And yet here she sits constantly miserable. I decide to try and show some care. "What's wrong, sis?"

"Excuse me?" she replies, slightly shocked.

"What's wrong? When you first got here, you seemed fine. Now, as dinner has gone on, it seems you're more and more unhappy. What's happened? Why the change?"

"I'm sorry. I don't know what's wrong with me." She tries hard to play it off but doesn't do too well. Suddenly she pulls her phone from her pocket and jumps up from the table with urgency. "Mom, I'm sorry, but I have to go. I cleaned up last time, so I think Miss Prissy Pants here can help this time." She points at me with her thumb.

My jaw drops. "What the fuck did I do?" I mumble more to myself, glad my mother didn't catch my f-bomb.

"What is your problem?" my father barks out.

"I said I have to go." She kisses my mother on the cheek, ignores my father, and bolts out the door without another word.

"What the hell has crawled up that woman's ass and died?"

I burst into laughter. Only my father would dare spit words like that out at dinner. "Jordan, that isn't funny, and

Caleb, watch your mouth. That's not a nice way to speak about your daughter." I bite my lip, trying to stifle my laughter.

"Sorry, dear, but she's been a nightmare lately, and she won't tell anyone why." My father's not lying. I even invited her to play pool with us last night. She gave me some crap about having a date, but I could tell from her stutter that she was lying.

"I'm going to start cleaning up." I grab some plates and leave the table. I'm not sure what's about to go down between my parents, but I do not want to witness it.

"I'll help," Grant announces, leaving the table with me.

When we get to the kitchen, Grant comes up behind me, wrapping his arms around my waist. "Hey, sexy. Are you coming to my place tonight?"

I look up over my shoulder. "Soon to be our place." I wink.

"I can't wait." He kisses me on the head.

"When are you moving in?" We both turn to see my father grinning at the fact that he's spoiled our moment.

"We'll discuss it tonight and let you know. I'll be safe and sound at his place, so you won't have to worry about anything." He stands at the snack bar, watching my every move as I load the dishes into the dishwasher. "What?"

"Nothing, I'm trying to wrap my head around all of this." He chuckles. "In middle school, you were our troublemaker. The poor grades, the fights. We had no idea what to do with you. You were so rebellious. And now, it's like you and your sister switched bodies."

"Wait, did you say fights?" Grant asks amused.

My father chuckles. "Yeah, she was picked on a bit and didn't take it too well. She even got into one fight defending her sister. It drove us crazy."

I shrug. "I guess we all have a time when we go into a funk. Mine was when I was younger, and hers is now. We need to be there for her. She'll come around, just as I did."

My father smiles at me. "You always see the good in people, and you're always so caring. It's one of the many reasons I was so floored when you told me you were joining the Army." He steps closer. "I never doubted your ability or perseverance." He shrugs. "You went from being my little delicate little dancer to a soldier. Seeing you trade in your ballet shoes for combat boots made me realize I was wrong." He kisses me on the head. "You're not gentle or fragile. You're fierce and strong."

I fight the tears threatening to break through the dam at my father's kind words. He has always been caring but never one to express his feelings, at least not until now. "I love you, Dad." I jump into his arms.

"I love you too. Be careful out there." He rubs my back.

"I got this." I wink, making him laugh.

My mom comes back into the kitchen with her phone to her ear. "Okay, sweetie. Have fun." She cuts the call.

"Piper apologizes. She had to meet her boyfriend but didn't want to bring him up because she's not ready for us to meet him yet."

I look at my mom with my one eyebrow cocked. "Says the girl who threw me under the bus for having a boyfriend." I shake my head.

After chatting with my parents a bit longer, Grant and I call it a night. He has to be up early tomorrow, and I need to start getting my stuff organized for school. I have a list of things I need to gather to be ready. I got my final schedule emailed to me on Friday, and I start my classes soon. It's going to be a long semester.

"Thanks for dinner, Valerie. It was delicious." She hands him the Tupperware bowl with enough leftovers for both of us.

"Thanks, Mom. I'll see you guys next weekend." Mom squeezes me tight. "I love you."

"Love you too."

"I'll walk you two out." My father opens the door and walks us to Grant's car. He looks Grant in the eye. "Keep an eye on my baby," he warns Grant.

"You're not the only one who carries a Glock." He lifts his shirt revealing the forty-five at his waist. "I've started carrying constantly since this all started. I have one at home too, right by my bed." He gives me a confident grin.

My father grins. "Smart man." My father gives him a quick man-hug and then hugs me goodbye.

As we're pulling away, his conversation about guns has me thinking. "You know, now that I'm in the military, it'd be a lot easier for me to get my license to carry. Maybe I should consider it."

He stops at a traffic light and glances over at me. "It would definitely be easier, but I think you should talk to your father about it."

"I agree. I don't want him to freak out because he discovers I'm carrying. I think he's under enough stress." I glance out the window into the dark sky. It's a clear night, some stars shining bright. My mind wanders.

"Holy shit Private Chowdah. You can actually shoot."

"Yes, drill sergeant." I stand as tall as I possibly can.

"Have you fired before?" He narrows his eyes at me.

"No drill sergeant."

"Fan fucking-tastic. I expect you to score expert. You hear me?"

"Yes, drill sergeant." He walks away, and a huge smile spreads across my face.

"Baby, we're home." Grant gently pulls me back from my thoughts. "Are you okay?"

I smile to reassure him. "Fine."

He climbs out and then hurries around to open my door for me. He links his fingers with mine, and we walk to the door hand in hand. It's a beautiful night. The air is cooling as summer is coming to an end. He leans down, presses a kiss to my lips, and unlocks the downstairs door.

"I'm so thankful we met," he says in a hushed tone as we walk up the stairs.

"It was fate." I squeeze his hand. "I love the saying, 'If it's meant to be, it'll be.' Maybe we were meant to be."

"I sure hope so." He winks at me.

He opens the door for us, but when I step inside, I stop dead in my tracks, causing Grant to bump into me. I drop the container I'm carrying, and my eyes are wide. I pant taking in the scene in front of me. He steps around me, taking in the pictures that are scattered all over the living room floor.

"What the fuck?" is all I can manage. I bend over to pick one of them up, but Grant stops me.

"Baby, we need to call this in." I'm just as concerned as he is because they not only know where I live, but they know where he lives. And these pictures are alarming.

"Fuck that, we're in your bed, naked," I scream, pulling at my hair. "How the fuck did someone get pictures of us having sex?" I scream out totally frustrated with the situation.

"I don't know, baby, but we're going to figure this out."

I shake my head. "You keep saying that, but we don't know any more than we did when this started, and to make matters worse, now you're being threatened too." I expel a deep breath. "My father can't know about these," I whisper, finding one last picture on the floor across the room. I'm on top of Grant, riding him. His hands are on my breasts. My head is tossed back with my long blonde curls cascading down my back. My eyes are closed with a look of total ecstasy written all over my face. In typed letters across the picture, it reads...

Soon I will be the one to put that look on your face!

Xoxo

Your Admirer

The end

Stay tuned for book two, Graceful Abduction!

ALSO BY VIVIAN FIANO

Walk Me Home

All I Want for Christmas

Refuse To Lose

Hustle and Heart

Rise Up

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I need to give a huge shout out to all of my readers! I know you have been waiting quite some time for this trilogy and I'm so excited to finally reveal it to you. I hope you all love Grant and Jordan as much as I do.

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Elle Christensen of Clover Book Designs did an amazing job with this cover. I absolutely love it and she is such a sweetheart to work with, check her out!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Vivian enjoyed reading as a child and found her passion for it again in 2011 when E.L. James' Fifty Shades of Grey was released. Her love of reading was re-ignited and she continued reading other books in the same genre.

Married to her own real life hero, Vivian met her love in Massachusetts where she was born and raised. She and her family now reside in sunny Florida and when she's not writing she enjoys playing soccer, basketball, and football with her son.

I invite you to join [Vie's Fireside Chat](#) on Facebook to chat learn more about me and my books.

